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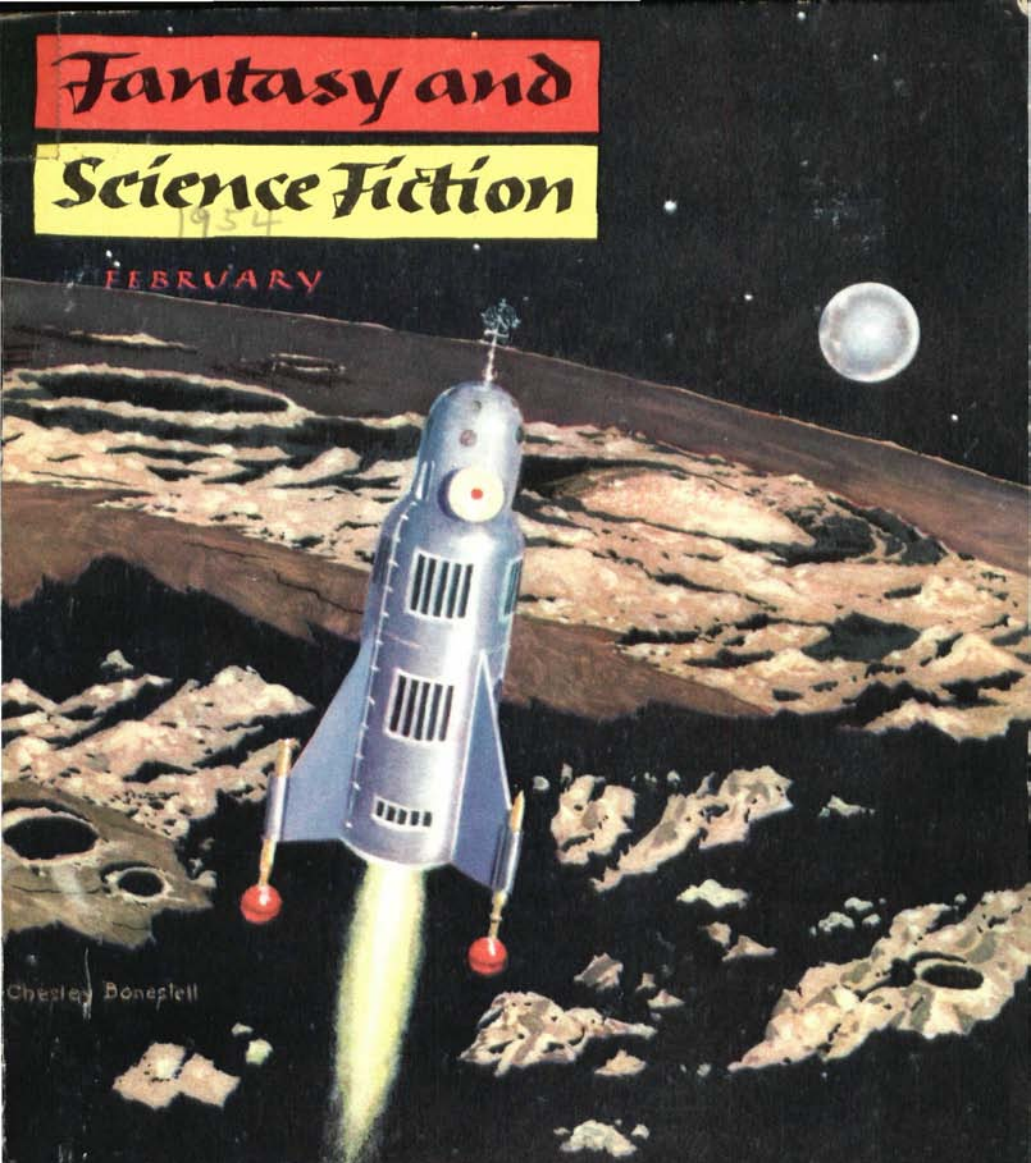

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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 6, No. 2 FEBRUARY

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(spaceship leaving the moon for Earth's artificial satellite)

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Under his real name, "William Morrison" is a general man of letters, writing everything from children's stories to adult quality fiction — which leaves us wondering how he finds time to turn out the large amount of distinguished science fiction which appears with the Morrison by-line. He's an old-timer in the field, dating back to 1941; but readers are apt to think of him as one of the newer writers because his work in the past four years has been so much more individual and offtrail than his earlier conventional science fiction. The Morrison name is now a trademark for unusually detailed and logical exploration of an odd idea — as in this, the first of a number of Morrison novelets which F&SF is happy to bring you. Here's an adventure story of peril on a strange planet — and also a wry and very funny commentary on family life, as it is today or will be in the Galactic Future, among ourselves or among giants 1167 feet tall.

Playground

by WILLIAM MORRISON

GEORGE WAS READING a book of old poetry, the kind that rhymed, when Jerry ran in and said, "Dad."

He frowned. "Haven't I told you before that I don't want to be interrupted when I'm reading?"

"I know, Dad, but I thought — well, this is kind of important. The gauge registers one-tenth gee."

"A planet or a sun?"

"A planet, but it looks kind of big. And our engines are missing, and it's pulling us down toward it, and Mom is kind of worried. She said —"

"Never mind what she said. I'll take a look."

He threw down the book of poetry, without even marking the page, and started to follow Jerry out of the room. By the time they reached the corridor, he was ahead of Jerry. Why the devil didn't the kid tell him in the first place that Sabina was worried? He'd have known then it was no trifle, he wouldn't have wasted time being annoyed and asking silly questions.

The rest of the family was in the pilot's cabin, Sabina at the controls, Lester peering over her shoulder, Carl trying to push Lester out of the way.

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Sabina looked up as he came hurrying in. "I don't think there's much danger, George," she said. "But I thought you ought to know."

"Of course I ought to know. Not that I'm worried about the way you handle the ship. Still —"

He stared at the instrument panel. "Point one three gee," said Sabina. "It's pulling us down."

"What's wrong with the engines?"

"There's just no power. I think that either the fuel line is clogged or something has diluted the uranium."

"Nothing wrong according to the instruments. But they may be out of order."

Sabina looked flushed and unusually pretty, as she did sometimes when she spent too much time over the electronic stove. "I think we'll have to land, George. The auxiliary engine is all right — I tested it. It'll take us down for a landing."

"But what sort of planet is this?"

"Diameter 12,000 miles, density one point five seven," began Lester officiously. "Atmosheeric pressure —"

"All right, all right. I can read the instruments."

Lester looked hurt, and Sabina said reproachfully, "Oh, George, he's only trying to be helpful."

We've been cooped up too long together, he thought. No family should be forced to spend more than a month in any ship. And here we've been getting on each other's nerves for half a year. But Sabina is right, I'm too brusque with the kid. He's only eight, and I mustn't hurt his feelings.

He said, "I'm sorry, Lester. Go on. What else does it say?"

"Atmosheeric pressure —"

"Atmo*spher*ic pressure, dear," corrected Sabina.

"Seventeen hundred twenty-two em em Hg at ground level —"

"Wow," said Jerry, who was eleven and knew that sea-level pressure on Earth was only 760 mm. "That's a lot."

"Atmosheeric — atmo*spher*ic composition: en two, 29 point seven, oh two, 31 point four, aitch ee, fourteen point one —"

"Too rich, but breathable," said George. "Thank God, we'll be able to adjust without too much trouble, and won't have to wear our space suits."

"Now don't make any promises you can't keep," warned Sabina. "You know we'll have to check on microorganisms first."

"I'm sorry I said anything," said George stiffly. "But I thought they knew that. We *always* check on microorganisms."

Carl, a bright-eyed youngster of three, had been standing there listening in wide-eyed silence. Now he said, "Mommy."

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"Yes, Carl."

"I wanna go home."

"Of course we'll go home, Carl."

"I don't wanna go to any planick."

"We *gotta* go to the planet first," explained Jerry. "We can't help ourselves. Pop gotta fix the engines —"

"I wanna go home. I don't wanna go to any planick. I wanna go home, I don't wanna go to any planick, I wanna go home, I don't wanna —"

George closed his eyes and took a deep breath. Here we go again, he thought. Next time I say anything about taking these kids on a vacation in space I'll know it's time to have my head examined.

Sabina looked as harried as he felt. She said, "You take over the ship, George. I've got a nice heat-pop for Carl. Would you like a nice heat-pop, Carl? A delicious yummy heat-pop that keeps your tongue nice and warm and tastes like ice cream or anything else you want it to taste like?"

"I wanna go home," said Carl.

Sabina took him firmly by the hand and half led, half dragged him away. George sat down at the controls.

It was a fair-sized planet with low average density. That meant that the surface gravity would be low. The kids will like that, he thought. It won't be too big a change from the low artificial gravity of the space ship. The high atmospheric pressure and oxygen content may make them a little excitable at first, but in the long run, the effects will do them good. They'll have a chance to run around and get some of the nervousness out of their systems. And there'll be more space, provided there aren't too many dangerous animals. Less chance of the kids getting in my hair. When I think of the month we've still got to go before we get back to Earth, my heart sinks. I could brain the guy who suggested we take that vacation.

The planet was growing now, a vast bluish-gray ball that was slowly filling the entire viewing screen. The altimeter began to function at 500,000 feet, as he switched on the auxiliary engine and began to spiral down. No features discernible in the landscape, he thought, not through those clouds.

At 100,000 feet the radar began to give him useful details of the landscape. He passed over a vast ocean and began to fly over solid ground. After a minute of this, however, something seemed to go wrong with the altimeter. The needle of light began to waver. Eighty thousand feet — 70,000 — 80,000 — 69,000 — 78,000 — 69,000 — 76,000 —

Mountains, he thought, peculiar mountains that stick up as isolated individuals above the surface. They'll make landing difficult. I'll have to be careful how I lose altitude. I'd better take it slow and easy until we get past the thickest cloud layers and actually see what's going on.

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Jerry and Lester were standing alongside him, knowing from experience that they'd better not interrupt. He could hear Sabina's footsteps as she came back. "Carl's asleep," she said. "That was the trouble with him, he was hungry and sleepy. He's all right when he's on a planet, and it gets light and dark outside, but when he's out in space he has no conception of day and night, and he just can't adjust. I think —"

Without turning around to look at her, George held up his hand. "Please, Sabina, not now. There's something strange going on down there."

Sabina subsided. He peered at the view screen, but the visible light that came from below was still gray and diffuse. And the radar wasn't too clear, while the altimeter still wavered. Fifty-nine thousand — 48,000 — 58,000 — 48,000 —

Mountains all over the place. Mountains that stuck sharp and high into the air as individuals, with deep valleys between them and their neighbors. And not a sign of flat land suitable for landing.

Or was there? Forty-six thousand, 45,000, 45,000 — it was holding rather steady now. This might be the place. The needle suddenly shot down again to 31,000, and he turned the ship back. He had found one plain, he mightn't find another. He'd land where he could.

They were breaking through the clouds now, and a sudden gasp came from the kids. "Look, Dad!" exclaimed Jerry. "Tree-mountains!"

The boy was right, he thought. That's what they were, huge trees as tall as mountains. That's why they rose into the sky as individuals, and there were no mountain ranges. They stretched away into the distance as far as he could see. A good thing, he told himself, we didn't try to land among them, or sure as shootin' we'd have had a bad smash.

Lucky too that he had turned back to find that one plain. It was a large clearing, with a dozen times as much space as he needed to make a landing. He could set the ship down right in the middle.

Sabina said wonderingly, "Is that *grass* down there?"

"It looks pretty tall, but I guess it is. Things seem to be done here on a big scale, Sabina."

"Gosh, Pop," said Jerry, "do you think the animals here are big too?"

"They probably are. However, I don't think we have to worry about that. Our atomic rifles should be able to scare them away."

"Will you let me shoot a rifle, Pop?" asked Lester eagerly.

"No," he said curtly. "And don't ask me again."

"Can *I* shoot it, Pop? I'm eleven, almost twelve —"

"Nobody is going to touch a rifle except your mother and me. Now, if you kids know what is good for you, you're going to drop the subject. I don't want anybody to distract my attention while I'm landing."

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He made the landing without trouble, not far from the center of the clearing. Then he began to take samples of the air and soil. The kids waited impatiently, anxious to get out into the fresh air. Gravity was low, about a half gee. They'd have a wonderful time running and bouncing around — provided there was no danger.

But they'd have to wait, he thought. It took three hours to complete the tests, and although the ship carried a wide range of antibiotics, it was still silly to take chances. They'd just have to hold their horses until he'd made sure there were no viruses or other strange forms of life that their medicines couldn't handle.

Sabina filled part of the time by giving them a meal. Then they watched a home stereo film. After that they came over to him, not saying a word, but nagging him by their mere presence. He was annoyed enough even without their help, and when Carl awoke, irritable as usual, and began to bawl, he was ready to send them out there to face whatever the planet had to offer.

But he didn't. He waited the full three hours, and at the end of that time he said, "All right, you can go out — with Mother. Sabina, better take a rifle. And give them their pocket pistols. I'll get set to make repairs."

"But you can't touch the engine until it cools off, dear."

"I know, but I want to get things ready. Now, remember, Jerry and Lester, don't put your pistols down, not for a minute. Keep them aimed at the ground. Do *not* point them at each other. And stay close to your mother."

"I wanna pistol," wailed Carl.

"You can sweat bullets, my fine-feathered friend, but you still won't get a pistol. Not for another two years. Take him away, Sabina, before his buzzing gets on my nerves and I swat him as I would a Martian mosquito."

Sabina hastily took Carl away, and George inhaled deeply. Ah, the blessed quiet, he thought. Too bad it can't last.

He got out his repair kit. Then he undid the anti-radiation chest and gave himself a shot. He'd better give them to Sabina and the kids too, he thought. Just in case they come monkeying around the engine while I'm fixing it and get a burst of rays accidental-like. Even Carl — especially Carl. He can scream all he wants to, but the way that kid pokes his nose into everything I'd better take no chances. And maybe the jab of the needle will convince him I mean business when I say I don't want to be bothered, and make him stay away from me for a while.

They had left the door of the ship open, and the heavy native air of the planet had rushed in. It was a little hard to breathe at first, but he knew he'd get used to it and suffer no after-effects. He had got used to worse air.

But what the devil was it so quiet about outside? What were Sabina

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and the kids doing? It's nice to be left alone, it's wonderful to have Sabina take care of them all by her sweet self — and she is sweet, as I have to admit — but still this is a strange planet, and there may be danger out there. She's only a weak woman after all, and those kids — well, you know how kids are, always thrusting their snotty little noses into places where they have no business. Quiet as profound as this is positively ominous.

He took another rifle from the rack and stepped out.

The scene was peaceful enough, if strange. The grass, oddly jointed red-green stalks a half foot thick, rose 50 feet into the air, way above the ship, which had burned a path through it in making a landing. A slight wind swayed the tops of the stalks and made a thin sighing noise as it wandered among them. The grass was wet, as from recent rain. Probably the reason the fire hadn't spread.

Through the path burned in the grass he could see that a dozen miles away the mountainous trees rose into the air, grotesque figures by virtue of their shape as well as their size. They were more like enormous cacti, of the Martian type, than the trees he had known. If they moved in the wind at all, it was to such a slight extent that he couldn't detect it. They seemed to be frozen into place.

It wasn't the plants, however, but the animals that worried him. Off to one side he heard a distant noise, as if something were crashing through the stalks of grass. Then quiet. And then the noise came from in front of him. It grew louder, came nearer —

A small reddish animal about two feet long leaped from the forest of grass. It moved so quickly that he had only a vague idea of the shape of the head and he couldn't be sure of the number of feet. Chasing after it came a mighty hunter — Carl, who pointed his finger and said, "Bang, bang!" And after Carl came Lester, who pointed a pistol and made a louder and more ominous bang.

A stalk of grass, ripped in two, bent and broke and then came crashing down, barely missing the eager Carl. "Lester!" shouted George. "Stop shooting! Stop it, do you hear me?"

After Lester came Jerry, and behind him Sabina. "What's going on here?" demanded George.

All three children began to explain at once, and George shut them up. "They were chasing that beast," said Sabina.

"Did it attack them?"

"Well, no. Jerry was in front, and Lester behind him, with Carl and me bringing up the rear. I was just a little ahead of Carl, who was sucking on another heat-pop. Suddenly I heard him cry and yell, 'Bad dog, bad dog!' "

"Bad dog," agreed Carl. "He took my pop."

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"Yes, that brazen animal stole Carl's pop right out of his hand. When we came after it, it ran back in this direction."

"And it made no attempt to harm any of the children?"

"No attempt at all."

"Let's hope the other animals aren't any more vicious. I think, Sabina, that from now on the kids had better stick closer to the ship. At least until we know our fauna better."

"But they do so like to run around," said Sabina wistfully.

"It's too dangerous to run where we can't see. The grass cuts off our view in every direction except where the ship's jets burned it down. We don't know what danger's going to swoop down on us next."

"I ain't afraid of no danger," said Lester. "You know what I'll do, Pop, if some animal jumps at me? I'll give 'im the old one-two. And then I'll point my pistol — *a-a-a-a-a* —"

"Don't you point that at me! Here, give it to me! We're in more danger from that than from the animals. Let's get back into the ship."

They had left the ship's door open, and sudden fear struck George. It would be an unpleasant surprise to find that some beast had sneaked in and was lying in wait for them. He began to hurry.

A great shadow blotted out the light above them. Then, as the shadow swooped down, there was a dull thud and the bow of the ship leaped into the air. The entire vessel trembled for a moment, then fell again and turned slightly on its side.

George and Sabina looked at each other. Jerry said, "What was that, Pop?"

"I don't know. Wait a minute, everybody. Don't move —"

There was a distant roar, as of a herd of cattle crashing through the great stalks of grass. Another shadow blotted out the light. George looked up and saw what seemed to a mountain towering over them.

"Down!" he shouted. "Everybody down!"

They threw themselves down, and even as they did so, George doubted the wisdom of the move. If that thing were the giant he thought it, a single footstep could obliterate the entire family. The shadow passed over them. They could hear the tearing and splintering of the grass, and then the noise diminished, and it was clear daylight once more.

He said, "We'd better get out of here."

A shadow again. This time it passed rapidly, and he could see its edges recede over the grass. It was circular in shape, as if the object which cast it were spherical. The object struck the ground, not the ship this time, and the shock sent an unpleasant tremor through all of them. Then the object rose into the air again.

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"Back to the ship!" ordered George. "Everybody back — quick!"

They ran into the ship and he shut the door. Outside there was another minor earthquake. And then silence.

He had never seen the kids so scared. They were speechless with fright. I can't blame them, he thought. I feel the same way.

It was Carl who recovered first. He said, "Bad dog took my pop. I wanna go home."

"Quiet, Carl," said Lester importantly.

"*You* be quiet," said Jerry.

We're getting back to normal, thought George. The dryness in his throat passed. He said, "It seems gone now. Hope it doesn't come back in a hurry."

"What do you think it was, George?" asked Sabina.

"Well, that thing that hit the ship first, and then the ground, seemed to bounce. And it had a curved edge. I'd say it was a ball of some kind."

"A ball, Pop?" exclaimed Jerry.

"You heard me. And that giant crashing through the grass must have been a kid playing with it."

"Some kid!" said Lester. "Gosh, Pop, he was as hooge as a house."

"*Huge*, dear," corrected Sabina.

"He was bigger'n a house. At least 1000 feet high," said Jerry.

"Maybe not that much. I'll admit I was in too much of a hurry to get a good look at him — if it is a him. It may have been a girl, or it may have been neither."

"Neither?" said Lester incredulously. "That's silly, Pop. A kid's gotta be *something*. If it ain't a boy it's a girl, and if it ain't a girl it's a boy. I remember that stereo Mom got us — it's all about sects —"

"*Sex*, dear."

"Let's not discuss that now," said George, feeling harried. "When I say I think this was a kid, I'm using the term loosely. I should say, perhaps, that it was the young of some intelligent species. I don't know how young, and I can't make any guess."

"But a thousand feet high, Pop!" said Jerry. "What'll he be when he grows up?"

"It wasn't a thousand feet — I'd say it was closer to 800, although as I've already told you, I didn't get enough time to make an accurate estimate. But even if the adult is no more than a thousand feet — well, I'm about average for a human being, six foot one, and those creatures are more than 106 times as big."

"To them," said Sabina, "we're like insects. Less than half an inch long."

"I'll bet they don't know we're alive," said Jerry.

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"But the ship's big enough for them to see," said George. "And if they catch sight of that —"

Carl added the proper comment by wailing, "I wanna go home."

"Me too," said Lester. "This place is fulla pearls."

"*Perils*, Lester," said Sabina automatically.

"We'll go home, all of us. But I've still a little work on those engines first. And they're not quite cool yet. So, in the meantime —"

There must have been an ominous note in his voice, for Jerry said uneasily, "Guess I'll look at a stereo, Pop."

"No you don't. You stay here. Everybody stay here."

"What for?"

"Anti-radiation injection. I'll just get the needles ready —"

"Aw, Pop," said Jerry. "I got one just last week."

"You'll take another one. I just gave one to myself."

"But it makes me break out all over —" began Lester.

"It does nothing of the kind. Now, stop all this nonsense. You're getting to be big kids, both of you, and you ought to be ashamed of yourselves making a fuss about a little injection. Even Carl wouldn't do a thing like that."

Carl promptly made a liar of him by beginning to yell, "I don't wanna needle! I wanna go home, I wanna go home —"

George had intended to save Carl for the last, letting the infant of the family profit by the good examples his older brothers set him. But Carl's bawling forced a change of plan. He seized the three-year-old and despite violent squirming jabbed the needle into the plump arm. Carl's voice rose in a shriek that might have been emitted by one of the damned, and Sabina hastily dragged him away. "You might have thought that hurt," muttered George in disgust. "All right, Lester, you're practically nine years old, you're next."

"I'm only eight — I'm just an infant, Pop! Jerry's older!"

"You're next, I said."

The needle bit again, and after that it was Jerry's turn. Jerry, as befitted his extreme age, exclaimed only, "Ouch!"

"What do you mean, 'ouch'? That didn't hurt at all."

"It didn't hurt you, but it hurt me."

"Don't be a sissy." George turned toward the engine. "Everything's cooled off now. I'm going to start making repairs. Anybody want to help?"

As it turned out, Jerry wasn't anxious, but Lester was gracious enough to offer his services, and when Jerry heard that, he offered his too. And as usual, after five exhausting minutes, both boys decided that they were tired and went off, leaving him alone.

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George grunted something about the kids these days growing up to be useless and wanting everything done for them, and went on with his work.

Outside, all was quiet. No crashing in the grass, no ominous shadows, no earthquakes.

Sabina came in and asked, "Need any help, dear?"

"Nothing, thank you. Just keep them out of my hair."

"I think I'll take them out again. The danger seems to have passed."

"We can't be sure. Just don't let them wander too far away from the ship."

"Don't worry, dear." She bent down and kissed him casually on the cheek as he worked, and he grunted again, tolerantly.

He was vaguely aware of her speaking in a low voice, telling the kids they mustn't bother him as they passed by. Even Carl, after the terrible experience of that injection, kept his mouth shut, and gave his father a wide berth on the way to the door.

The engine's main feed line had been clogged. Some non-fissionable, non-fusible material had got in and diluted the fuel, and getting the impurity out without waste meant handling with tongs and using the slow process of remote control purification. And now that he looked at it, he could see that there was a weak spot due to corrosion, and that would have to be fixed before they went any further. A good ten hours of additional work, he thought, even if he was lucky. And closer to twenty, if he wasn't.

He had become absorbed in the work, and it was with surprise that he looked up to see Sabina and the children come trooping back. "Have a good time?" he asked.

"Oh, it was wonderful," said Sabina. "The children haven't enjoyed themselves so much for ages."

"What did they do?"

"Well, they found a little pool, probably created by that rain that fell before we got here. And they went in swimming."

"Swimming?"

"Oh, don't worry, George, I disinfected the water first. If you could have seen what a time they had splashing around you'd have been only too happy to join them."

"I suppose you went in too."

"Just for a little," she admitted. "Next time, George, we'll drag you along."

"Maybe. See any animals?"

"There was one beast like the one that stole Carl's pop. But it ran away when it saw us, and there were no big ones."

"No giants throwing a ball around?"

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"Not a soul, large or small. I couldn't have asked for a better playground."

"Fine. Now, if you don't mind, I'll get on with my work."

"But it's getting dark, George. The sun is setting outside."

"What of it? This job has to be done, and we don't go by this planet's time."

"But you'll have to use artificial light. And if you don't want to start our air-purifiers, and leave the door open, some giant may notice it and come looking for the ship."

"They'll think it's a firefly."

"How do you know they have fireflies here? So far we haven't seen a single insect."

"Then I'll keep the door closed."

"You're so stubborn," she sighed. "It's no use talking to you."

"You knew that when you married me."

"I thought you'd change. Oh, well, I'm going to make supper."

He went on working until it was time to eat. But after supper he suddenly felt tired. "Been up for a long time," he yawned. "Better get some sleep."

"I feel tired too."

So, for that matter, did the children — all except Carl. Carl had slept during the afternoon. Now he was wide awake and full of pep, and he insisted on letting everybody know that he wanted to go home. Sabina said, "I swear, I'm never going to take that child off Earth again. He's got the most irregular sleeping hours."

"Put him in a weightless rocker," suggested George, "and shake the energy out of him. Maybe that'll do the trick."

It did, and presently they all slept.

George was awakened by an earthquake. He could feel the ship heave up in the air and then spin around its axis. When it came to rest again, everything was upside down.

Carl was bawling, and the other kids were yelling, and Sabina was saying drowsily, with her eyes less than half open, "What happened? Did the alarm go off?"

"No, but it's time to get up anyway," said George. The ground had stopped quaking, and he stared into the visor that gave them a picture of the ship's surroundings. "I'll be damned. It's morning!"

"Already? I just closed my eyes!"

"Either this planet has an abnormally short period of rotation, or it's summer here, and we're closer to one of the poles than I thought. Anyway, we've been asleep only five hours, and it's morning."

"But what made the ground shake?"

"I don't know — wait a minute, maybe I do." They crowded around

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him, staring into the visor together. "There's some animal, pretty far away. Let's see if I can get some figures on this." He adjusted the range finder. "Five thousand feet away — the thing must be 500 feet high!"

"It's gi*ant*ic," said Lester, "and it's jumping around. That's what made the earthquake."

"And there's another figure — that must be the kid. Seven hundred eighty feet high — my guess of eight hundred was a good one. Maybe the smaller one is a pet."

"But what kind of creatures are they?" demanded Sabina. "I can't make them out."

"The one I called the kid is kind of human — I think. It has two legs."

"They got a funny shape, Pop," said Lester.

"They're broad, and they're heavier at the base than at the top. The body, in fact, seems to taper considerably. I suppose that if it were too heavy the legs wouldn't support it, even on a low-gravity planet like this."

"I see four arms, Pop!" exclaimed Jerry.

"I see a face, Pop!" cried Lester.

"If you can call it a face," said George. "Well, let's be generous and say it is. There are eyes —"

"Three of them, Pop!" announced Jerry.

"I can count. There seem to be half a dozen noses and several mouths. And I'm not sure that I can tell one from the other."

"But it's a child all the same," said Sabina. "Look, dear, he's holding something in his hand. It's a kind of stick. He's striking at the grass tops with it. And now he's throwing it!"

"And that animal is chasing it!" said Jerry. "Just like a dog — only it's hopping like a frog!"

"Gosh," said Lester. "I hope he don't throw it this way. That hopping thing would pulmerize us."

"Pul*ver*ize, dear."

"I wanna go home," said Carl.

"That's an idea," agreed George. "Look, everybody, while Mom is getting breakfast ready, I'll have to be working on that engine. I found another corroded spot late yesterday, and it's going to take me longer than I thought at first. I want you kids to keep an eye on that little giant outside."

"Okay, Pop," said Jerry. And he added wistfully, "He's lucky. Wish I had a dog to play with out there!"

That was an old subject for discussion, and a sore one. But George had long ago decided that in a space ship a dog would be a nuisance, so now he simply ignored the remark and went about his work. He started to splatter a thin layer of metal over the corroded spots, trying at the same time not

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to hurry too much. He didn't dare do a bad job, or the patch would fall apart, and the engines would start missing again out in space. And next time there mightn't be a planet as convenient as this one to land on.

He interrupted work for five minutes to eat, and then fell to again. Later that morning, the giant kid and his pet disappeared, and Sabina took the children outside. They went swimming again, and George, on hearing their glowing reports about the fun they had had, was strongly tempted to follow their example. But the work comes first, he told himself sternly. The work always comes first. That giant kid and his pet dog-frog don't seem to be vicious, but they're dangerous simply by virtue of their size. The sooner we get out of here the better.

When he knocked off for lunch five hours later, he noted that all three children had a healthy, ruddy look about them. "The sun here gives you a beautiful tan," said Sabina. "This is really a wonderful vacation spot."

"Provided you don't get stepped on."

"Oh, I'm not afraid of that any more."

"The trouble is," he told her, "that you're getting used to the danger. You're beginning to think it's nothing. Just because you've had luck so far."

"It's hard to think of danger from that child, even though he is a giant," admitted Sabina. "The way he plays with his pet is so human."

"His face isn't."

Jerry was staring at the visor. He yelled suddenly, "Hey — look, everybody! There's another one!"

They all ran over to see. In addition to the smaller giant, the one they had noticed before, there was a larger one, about one and a half times the first one's height. Eleven hundred and sixty-seven feet, by the range- and size-finder. The two giants were standing close together, and George felt a tremor come up through his feet and pass through his body.

"Is that another earthquake?" asked Lester anxiously.

"No, I think it's just the vibration from their conversation. They're so much bigger than we are that all their sounds are pitched much lower. Probably the vibrations aren't perceived as sound at all, but directly as sensations of a different kind."

"You know," said Sabina, "There's something about her — well, I can't be sure, of course, but I get the impression that's his mother."

"You can't prove anything by me," said George. "As Lester would say, I see no sign of sects."

"She seems to be bawling him out about something. She's pointing with one of her arms. What's she pointing to, George?"

"Wait a minute, and I'll focus the range finder. Say — that's strange!"

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"What is it, Pop?" asked Lester.

"A wall. It wasn't there when we landed. A rough red wall in front of the mountain-trees. And it turns to blue over at the side."

"And further over," cried Sabina, "it's yellow."

"Let's figure this out. If it wasn't there yesterday, then *they*'re the ones who have put it up. But why? The top of the wall seems to be pretty even —"

He stopped, with a strange puzzled look in his eyes. Sabina said, "Why, of course, I should have known at once. It's the family wash!"

"You mean the giants wash their clothes?" demanded Jerry. "Why should they do that?"

"You wouldn't understand, but I think they don't like dirt. Really, they're very human."

"They're dopey. Who's afraid of dirt?" demanded Jerry.

"But why did she point to the wash, Mom?" asked Lester.

"Yeah, and why is she bawling him out?" asked her other large son. "When you bawl *us* out, Mom — hey, what's she doing that for?"

George had focused on the two giants again. Now, as they watched, they saw a great arm swing and make contact with the smaller giant's face. The young one went down, the thud bouncing the ship an inch off the ground. And then the entire vessel shook with a series of violent vibrations.

"The nasty thing," said Sabina. "She slapped him in the face and knocked him down. And he's crying! That's what's shaking the ship!"

"Well, he'd better stop crying," said George crossly. "How can I do any work with all this shaking going on?"

"But why did she hit him, Ma?" persisted Jerry.

"She's just got a nasty streak in her," said Sabina, looking mad. "I'd like to give that woman a piece of my mind."

"Oh, don't get worked up about it," said George. "She must have had some good reason —" He focused on the wall again. "Look there — that green part. With a great patch of brown right in the middle. Dirt! He dirtied her wash!"

"That's still no reason to hit a child. Things like that happen all the time."

"Maybe she hasn't had the advantage of a book on child psychology," said George. "Cut it out, Sabina. Stop trying to run other people's business for them. Personally, I can understand how she feels. Sometimes when Carl starts his yapping I've wanted to wallop that kid so hard —"

"Don't you dare lay a finger on that poor child," said Sabina warningly, and Carl, scenting danger, edged closer to her.

"I'm not threatening him. I'm just telling you the way I feel — sometimes. And I'll bet you feel the same way, too — sometimes."

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"I do not. I'll admit that occasionally I'm annoyed with him, but I *never* hit him."

"Well, it seems to me I remember that about a week ago —"

"Hey, Pop," said Jerry. "She went away. He's picking himself up. He's patting his pet!"

"After all that sympathy your mother was wasting on him. Anyway, the ship isn't shaking any more. I'm getting to work again," said George.

For a while there was a coolness between him and Sabina. But once he became absorbed in his work again, he forgot about it. And after he had been working for another few hours, he allowed Sabina to coax him into going swimming with them. He was slowing down, he admitted. He'd work all the faster and more efficiently for a slight change. And the water was so delicious, Sabina assured him, that she didn't want him to miss it.

Carl had suddenly fallen asleep again, and Sabina was sure he wouldn't awaken for at least an hour. They left him in the ship, with the door open, as they trekked down to the pool in the forest of grass. To the giants it was probably merely a wet spot in the fields, left over from the last rain. But to human beings it was a fair-sized swimming hole, almost thirty feet long, and at least twenty wide. The only place that was over his head was in the center.

They left two rifles at the edges of the pool, one at each side, so that no matter from which of the two directions danger approached they'd be able to get to a weapon. But once he had dived in, George forgot all about danger. This was a pleasure he hadn't had in a long time. He was a little out of practise, but with the low gravity of the planet, it didn't take much energy to leap and dive around, and the swimming was just as delicious as Sabina had said it would be.

He had just come out to dry off when the ominous sound of some body crashing through the grass smote his ears. Almost the next second, it seemed, shadows loomed above them.

It was the giant child and his pet. George grabbed his rifle and swung around bravely to face the danger and defend his family. The ground shook from the leaping of the pet, and the wind from the great creature's approach whistled about their ears. The thing was coming straight at them.

George raised the rifle, aimed — although that was hardly necessary in view of the size of his target — and fired. The animal roared (the sound must have been a high yelp compared to the usual subsonic vibrations the creatures emitted, thought George). It swerved aside, stopped to poke at its body with a huge foot, and squirmed unhappily.

George was about to order everybody back to the ship, when a human scream came to them. He swung around in the direction of the ship, and froze in terror.

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The giant kid had found the ship. He had picked it up and was examining it, holding it fairly close to his eyes, about six hundred feet above the ground. High up there George thought he could make out the tiny figure of Carl, near the open door. At any moment, Carl might drop out and plummet through the air to the ground far below.

George raised his rifle again, but Sabina grabbed his arm. "Don't shoot," she panted. "The sting will only startle him, and he'll drop the ship. Wait."

But waiting wasn't easy. The giant kid seemed to be very much interested, and he took an endless time to make up his mind. He held the ship at different angles in the palm of one of his hands, and then he tried to peer into it. Once he held it up to the side of his head. To his ears, thought George, although these were either invisible or unrecognizable to the human beings far below.

He couldn't hear Carl any more. All the same, if I know that kid, thought George, he's still yelling. The giant can't hear him, though. To him, Carl's voice emits nothing but supersonic vibrations that his organs of hearing can't perceive.

After a time the giant seemed to make up his mind. He bent down and put the ship back in the grass. He didn't place it down as carefully as a mother would have done, but it had only a few feet to fall before coming to rest, and George was sure that Carl hadn't received any serious shock.

As the giant kid moved on, Sabina closed her eyes and swayed. George felt sure she was going to faint — he felt like fainting himself. But she didn't. She merely opened her eyes again and said, "Come on. I must find out what happened to him."

As they rushed toward the ship, the reassuring sound of Carl's bawling met them. Carl was yelling, "I wanna go home! I wanna go home!"

"I don't blame him," said George. "I want to go home myself." He fell into a seat, his legs suddenly weak. "When I think what that giant kid might have done —"

"He didn't," said Sabina. "He was curious, but not vicious. There are many human children who wouldn't have behaved so well, George. When they find something small and helpless, they torture it and tear it to pieces."

"Let's not make this sound any worse than it is," said George. "Carl is safe. Okay. Let's be thankful and do our best to see that we don't run into any more trouble. I've had all the swimming I need for a month. I'm going to finish up this repair job, with no more time out for fun."

"But I can't get over that giant child," said Sabina. "So sweet and gentle. What sort of woman would strike a child like that I can't imagine. I don't think she's much of a mother."

"It's none of your business, and there's nothing you can do about it.

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Now be quiet and take the kids out, and let me get on with my work."

"We won't bother you, Pop," said Lester. "We'll be mump."

"*Mum*, dear."

"I can't get anything done with a lot of conversation going on. Sabina, please —"

"Oh, all right, all right. But it seems to me that you're making most of the conversation yourself. Come, children, leave your father alone."

"Can't I help him, Ma?" asked Jerry. "I could hand him the tools —"

"Good idea. Let Jerry stay," said George.

"Why should he stay and not me?" demanded Lester. "Mom, I wanna stay too. I got a right to stay if he stays, Mom."

"He's older," said George.

"He gets everything because he's older! It ain't fair! If he stays —"

"Out!" said George. "Everybody!"

He could hear the quarrel still going on as they went into the next room. They forgot to close the door, and he slammed it after them.

It was a long afternoon. By the time the sun was touching the horizon, the children had been sent to sleep and he himself had finished his work. Repairs had been made, the ship was spaceworthy once more.

Now to get it into the air and then into space. But here there was a difficulty.

The ship had been tossed around several times after landing, and finally picked up and laid down again. Its stern pointed up into the air, its nose into the ground. It lay at an angle on its right side, like a stranded fish. Before taking off, it would have to be set right.

"I'll have to maneuver it around for a little while," George told Sabina. "It'll take me at least a half hour to get it into position."

"You can use your secondary jets. But, George, there's something you didn't think of. We're out here in the middle of a grass forest. And it's no longer wet, the way it was when we landed. The jets might set it on fire. In fact, they're *sure* to set it on fire."

"So what? When the ship is sealed, it's heat proof."

"Yes, but don't you see? The fire may spread and burn these poor giants out of house and home."

"Look, Sabina, why worry about them? I thought you didn't like that woman, anyway."

"I don't, but still it isn't the right thing to do. Nasty as she is, she doesn't deserve that. And the child would suffer too. And the father, if they have fathers."

"But, Sabina, even if it does inconvenience them, with us it's a matter of life and death. We've got to get out of here."

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"I know, but —"

"Now don't start getting sentimental about a bunch of giants. We have to look out for ourselves. Even if a fire starts, they can put it out. They can just stamp it out. All they have to do is put their big feet down — wait a minute, that's a thought."

"About putting their feet down?"

"Yes. The fire will start right away, but we'll have to stick around for a half hour or so. Suppose they come out here to put it out and step on *us*."

"They might do that, George. So it would be better if you didn't start a fire."

"But what am I going to do? Clear the forest away from around the ship? That would take days. And besides, that would attract their attention almost as much as a fire would. They'd come out to investigate what was making the grass disappear from the middle of their field."

Sabina said, "I don't know what to say. Why don't we wait till morning, George? We can both of us use a night's rest. And in the morning we'll be able to think more clearly, and decide what to do."

"I hate to stay here another night."

"But nothing happens during the night, George. The giants sleep. And if they do come close, the vibrations from their footsteps will awaken us."

"Well, I *am* tired — all right, Sabina, if you wish we'll get a night's rest and see what we can do in the morning."

The short night passed quietly. In the morning the photometric alarm was set to wake them with the increase in light from the rising sun, after what turned out to be only four hours of sleep. George got out of bed yawning and protesting. Sabina didn't hear a sound, however, and it took Carl's bawling to awaken her. Jerry had got into a fight with Lester, and Lester, on the losing end because of his more tender years, had decided to take out his feelings on his still younger brother. Hence Carl's lamentations.

The giants, if they were up, weren't about. Sabina prepared a hasty breakfast, and after they ate, George said, "I feel drugged. My eyes just keep closing. What was that stuff you were saying about being able to think more clearly in the morning?"

"I don't know. What did I say?"

"We have to get the ship in position to take off. Remember? And we don't want to use the jets for fear of starting a fire and attracting those giants."

Jerry said, "Ma, can we go swimming this morning?"

"No more swimming."

"Aw, gee, Ma, just once more."

"Stop nagging your mother," said George. "You're not leaving."

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"I wonder," said Sabina. "That giant child —"

"What about him?"

"If he knew what we wanted, he'd help us."

"If he knew what we wanted — that's some idea! How could he possibly know? There's no method of communication we can use. It would take weeks even for one of our linguists to learn their vibration language."

"Yes, I know, but — there must be *some* way, George."

"If there is, you name it, and we'll do it."

Carl, who was sitting on Sabina's lap, crawled down to the floor and pounced suddenly on a small greenish object a couple of inches long. "Ship," he said. "I gotta ship."

"What is it, Carl?" asked Lester. "Let me see!"

"Mommy, he's trying to take it away from me!"

"I just want to look at it, Ma! I want to see what it is!"

"*I'll* look at it." Sabina examined the object curiously, then gave it back to Carl. "It must be a grass seed," she said. "It must have fallen on our clothes, and been carried by one of us into the ship."

"That's right, Mom," said Jerry. "Here's another one."

"It's a ship," insisted Carl. "I gotta ship."

"He thinks a grass seed is a ship. And I'll bet that giant kid," said George, "thought our ship was a funny kind of grass seed."

I hope he don't pick us up again," said Jerry.

"Why not?" said Sabina. "George, maybe that's the answer! If we could get him to pick the ship up and hold it in the air, he'd keep turning it around, the way he did before, and sooner or later he'd point it up. And then you could jet off."

"But we'd have the same difficulty we already talked about. How do we get him to pick up the ship? We can't explain anything."

"We don't have to explain. Suppose you send a cloud of smoke through the jets. You could do that, couldn't you, George?"

"Yes, I could do that."

"Well, being curious, like any kid, he'd come over here to see what it was. And then he'd pick us up —"

"We might get hurt," said Jerry.

"We'd strap ourselves in position first. And Daddy would be at the controls, ready to start."

"It's a possibility," admitted George. "Let's try it. Start strapping them in, Sabina, and I'll get some stalks of grass."

A quarter of an hour later they were ready. And just about that time, the young giant and his pet made their appearance in the field, at a distance of ten thousand feet.

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George had brought some of the huge grass stalks into the ship. Now he put them into the chemical combustion chamber, started them burning with insufficient air, and sent a cloud of smoke through the jets. To the young giant, he thought, it must look like the faintest trickle of smoke. The chances were that the youngster would overlook it entirely.

For a while nothing happened. Then the pet animal's face began to twitch.

"He's sniffing!" cried Jerry. "He smells the smoke!"

The animal bounced toward them, its master following. Now the young giant caught sight of the trickle of smoke, and he paused. George began shooting smoke through the jets as fast as he could.

The giant came cautiously closer and bent down, as if afraid that some insect would sting him. His face blotted the sky from the visor —

He was picking the ship up. George whirled head over heels, but like the others he was strapped into position, and being upside down in the low gravity wasn't so bad. Carl, however, didn't like it. He yelled for his mother.

There came a bad ten seconds when the giant youngster shook the ship, probably listening to see if anything rattled inside. That didn't feel so good, and Carl began to bawl even louder. Then the ship righted, and for a moment its nose pointed ahead and up.

George pressed the button which set the engine to firing. The ship spurted ahead, probably leaving the giant youngster with all his mouths open in surprise.

They were 400 feet over the grass tops now. A red wall loomed ahead, more than 1000 feet high, and there was no chance to clear it. They tore straight through, hardly feeling the shock, and then George pointed the nose of the ship up still more sharply, and soon they had skimmed the edge of the mountain trees and were rising higher and higher.

George breathed a sigh of relief, and began to unstrap himself. "Okay," he said. "We made it. We can go home now."

"That poor kid," said Sabina.

"What? I'm sure I didn't hurt him. If he had the middle of the ship in the palm of his hand, the jets probably sent the exhaust into the air, and didn't even get his hand hot. At worst we might have given him a slight scorching that he'll get over fast."

"I don't mean that," said Sabina. "But that red wall — we went right through it. We ruined the garment, whatever it was."

"I suppose his mother can patch it up."

"That isn't what I mean either. Don't you see, George, they don't know about us, and if he tries to explain, a nasty woman like her won't believe him. She's sure to blame him for whatever happened. She'll beat him."

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"I'm sorry. I guess he can take it, though."

"But it hurts to see a woman of her kind mistreat a child so. And he's such a sweet child. Such a beautiful disposition, so thoughtful and kind-hearted. I'd hate to think she might break his spirit."

What do you say to a wife who talks like that? George demanded of himself. He could think of nothing suitable, and he just grunted.

Carl cried suddenly, "I don't wanna go home. I wanna go back to the playground. I wanna go swimmin'!"

"Shut up, Carl!" cried Sabina, turning on him savagely. "Shut up, or I'll give you a spanking you'll never forget! I'm sick and tired of your whining!"

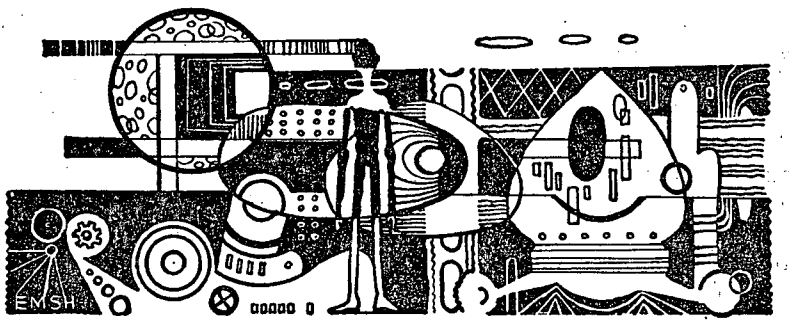
Amazed at this sudden outburst from a parent from whom he had expected sympathy, Carl closed his mouth.

"He's really a doll."

"Carl?"

"No, that giant child, of course. And with a mother like that!"

Situation normal, thought George. And he headed the ship for home.



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From this instructive tale we may learn that the syndicated scope of Dr. Aesop Abercrombie's column includes even the Thunderer itself, the London TIMES; *that worse fates may await the purloiner of an idol's eye than any dreamed of by Wilkie Collins or Lord Dunsany; and that even these horrors may dissolve before the gentle suasion of the good doctor's advice.*

Somewhere East of Rudyard

by ESTHER CARLSON

THE MEDICAL MISSIONARY, a rather beefy girl with moist brown eyes and a mannish haircut, leaned over Albert P. "Rangoon" Rappaport.

"Don't give up hope," she whispered harshly. "There must be a way."

Rangoon, known in book stalls and lecture halls from Okinawa to Oskaloosa as the "poor man's Trader Horn," drank deeply from his gin-and-quinine, slapped his putteed leg with a fly swatter, and stared disconsolately at the bougainvillaea bush, drooping now in the heat of India's sunny clime.

"As I understand it, you took the ruby out of the idol's navel and put it in your trouser pocket and then forgot and sent the trousers to the cleaner. . . ? And the heathens won't believe you when you say you *can't* give it back. Then Monday a week you found a Sign on the doorstep and ever since you've talked like a certain poet whose very name . . ."

Rangoon nodded. "For the wind is in the palm trees, and the temple priests they say: give it back, you British #$%*&, give it back, without delay." A spasm of self-loathing crossed his face.

"Try to write what you want to say," the missionary said compassionately.

She took a large prescription pad from her bag and gave it to him, along with an automatic pencil. Rangoon moved his beard aside and, with the pad on his knee, carefully, with much erasing and crossing out and many pitiful glances at his visitor, managed to inscribe in a crabbed hand:

"Was going to make ruby tie pin visible back row any auditorium. God have mercy on such as me, Baa! Yah! Baa!"

He moaned and hid his face in his hands as she read the note and consequently did not see the tender smile that broke her lipless mouth.

"So that's how it is," she said. "Even when you write. They thought of everything."

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He hung his head.

"Well," she continued cheerfully, "it's too late to worry about giving it back. The only thing left to do is to fight. I, myself, will do the best I can to heal your spirit, but the other . . . In my opinion, there is only one other person in the world who will Understand and Help you. Will you write to him today?"

And as he raised the gin bottle to his trembling lips, the good woman scribbled a name on her pad, the magic name of Dr. Aesop Abercrombie.

One of Dr. Aesop Abercrombie's syndicated patients, a lad suffering from warts in lower Brooklyn, collected stamps; therefore the doctor's kindly eyes lit up with delight when he saw in his morning's mail a splendidly postaged letter from far-off India.

His joy was unconfined when he drew the penciled sheet from the envelope and saw that among his many readers, in the multitudes that followed his daily health column, was none other than the most famous Rappaport of them all.

"Damn it all, sir [the letter commenced], I've had scurvy with the worst of them from China cross the bay, and a bullet where my belt plate should have been. I've been eaten up by flies where the old flotilla lies and the metal in my knee caps isn't tin. But I pulled a sad faux pas when I went against the law and snitched the temple jewel at Kurry Djiin. They have put a curse upon me. East is East and West is West. Save me. Help.

. Drinking bitter beer alone,
Rangoon Rappaport."

"Good heavens," ejaculated the doctor, soaking off the stamps in his tepid tea and staring at the letter. "What ever has happened to Rangoon's style? Indeed, his situation *is* desperate." And, shoving all his other correspondence aside, he dictated his merciful advice.

The rainy season had set in; the bo tree in the courtyard dripped with fetid moisture. Fungus crawled over the walls and ceiling of the bungalow and giant insects fell from the light fixtures. A cobra moved in under the davenport. Rangoon Rappaport, shunned by those who formerly fawned upon him, lay in his mildewed hammock and soaked himself with gin.

On a particularly dismal afternoon in late December, Rangoon Rappaport flung aside his empty bottle and picked up a service revolver and placed the barrel an inch foreward of his right ear.

"There's worser things than marchin' from Umballa to Cawnpore," he muttered, and his finger tensed on the trigger.

"*Stop!*"

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Up the walk, under a huge umbrella, ran a female figure and in her hand waved a newspaper.

"Mr. Rappaport," she carolled, "Mr. Rappaport, aid has come in the nick of time. Dr. Abercrombie has answered your plea!"

Gaining the verandah, she closed her umbrella, shook it, and placed it in a corner. Her moist brown eyes glowed. Rangoon Rappaport sat up and put on his tropical helmet.

"Listen," she panted. "I'll read you what he says:

" 'Dear Rappaport:

" 'Come now. Am I to believe that a man of your wide knowledge has fallen prey to the ignorant and foolish superstitions of the hottentots? You have appropriated a heathen religious article much as a collector might pick up a piece of old Wedgwood. What is wrong in that? Therefore, do not believe in this fanciful curse. Say to yourself: Nonsense! Tommyrot! Balderdash! Laugh heartily at the simple effrontery of these unwashed, backward people. Scorn them for their child-like methods of revenge, yet find it in your heart also to forgive and forget.

" 'Above all, *keep a cool head and carry on!*

" 'Dr. A. Abercrombie.' "

Miss Evangeline Widdershins (for such was her name) shook the TIMES under Rangoon's nose.

"You see," she cried. "There is a cure. Say these words to yourself."

Rangoon smiled at her humbly and took the paper. "Nonsense," he read haltingly.

"Fine!"

"Tommy . . . Tommy . . . Tommy this and Tommy that and . . ."

"Tommy*rot*," finished Miss Widdershins. "Now the next one."

"Boots, Boots, Boots, Boots, marching up and down again?"

"No," the earnest female shouted. "*Balderdash.* Say it!"

Rangoon marshalled his forces, gritted his teeth, swallowed hard, and said quite clearly: "Balderdash."

She leaned forward and gripped his shoulder.

"You can do it. Carry on. Go now to the Club and face them all with your head held high."

"Cooler in the Club anyhow," he muttered, "like Abercrombie says."

"Yes, keep a cool head," she repeated slowly. Her fingers relaxed upon his shoulder and became almost caressing. "Oh Albert," she said, "it won't be easy. But always remember, I understand."

Hope came again to the stricken man. He put his revolver back in the bureau drawer, combed his whiskers, got a clean handkerchief, and ventured

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out of doors in the direction of the Club, which he had avoided, not without encouragement, since the curse had settled on his tongue and pen.

During the rainy season the Club was, of course, in full cry; the whist room was crowded; auxiliary tables for dominoes had to be set up in the cloakroom, and the bar was lined, two deep, with squint-eyed, leather-faced men whose tans were fading to a greenish cream on account of the inclement weather.

Unnoticed, Rangoon felt the swinging doors swish noiselessly behind him, and he eked his way through the chattering throng to the teakwood strip.

"Yes, Sahib?" said the native bartender efficiently; then he ogled.

Rangoon hardened his diaphragm, lifted his head, counseled his vocal chords and mumbled: "Gin-and-quinine."

He was rewarded with a popeyed stare of astonishment from the Hindoo.

The stout chap next to him turned suddenly: "Oh, I say, have I the honor to address the author of *Batting Through Bengal?*"

Rangoon clutched his drink in desperation; but realizing that the colonial was down from the hills but recently and was not jibing, he nodded.

"I say," the other boomed enthusiastically, "this is marvelous. What luck! I've always wanted to ask you: when that lash of man-eating tigers on page 40 attacked you, what happened? My nephew tore that particular page out of the book and, good heavens, I often wondered if you escaped alive."

"Well," Rangoon said, feeling warmed and heartened by the first truly natural human contact in four months, "if you can keep your head when all about you . . ." He stopped and gagged. "I ran," he finished quickly.

The colonial's face showed deep disappointment for an instant, then brightened. "Ran at them I fancy," he said. "Cleaned them out. Got the hides all over your libr'y to the little wife's dismay, I fancy."

"For all their dirty 'ides, they was white, clear white, inside," Rangoon blurted out.

"Extraordinary," the colonial said. "White, you say. Anemic, no doubt."

Rangoon downed his liquor and faced up to the bartender whose dark eyes leered evilly from his swarthy phiz.

Resisting an impulse to order a Gunga Gin, Rangoon, with mighty strain, managed to shout: "Rum collins" and the long bar seemed to wiggle like a boa constrictor in his vision.

"I say," the colonial went on (to Rangoon's misery a small crowd had gathered about them to listen curiously), "I'm about to have tiffin with the Governor General. Do come along. He's a top-hole fan of yours, you know."

All ears bent for Rangoon's answer and from the corner of his eye the

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cursed man saw small wagers laid, with odds of 99 to 1. Rapidly the whist room was emptying to collect around the question, which hovered in the air. The bartender smiled the inscrutable smile of the East.

Rangoon tugged frantically at his beard. Nonsense, he thought. Tommyrot and balderdash. I refuse to believe. I must *carry on.* Oh, Evangeline, be with me now, for I want to have tiffin with the Governor General more than life itself.

Of course, he thought of several things to say. There was "You can bet your bloomin' nut" and "I'll come and 'ave a romp with you whenever you're inclined," not to mention "It's five times better business than paradin' in full kilt."

But he must not give way! Froth gathered about the corners of his lip; his face grew ghastly white. His glass of collins shattered in his hand, so great was the pressure of his nervous fingers. The room began to tip, first one way then the other, and a great black curtain commenced to slide from the ceiling, blotting out all consciousness. Suddenly a pinpoint of light rent the darkness, grew, swelled, spread. And in the "window" as it were appeared the compelling countenance of Miss Widdershins, holding before her Dr. Abercrombie's letter. *There is no 'curse'*, she seemed to be saying. *Cool off and carry on!*

He relaxed, he felt calm, at ease, at peace. He turned to the unwashed bartender and sneered at his simple effrontery, not forgetting to finish it up with a beam of forgiveness. He gazed at the encircling throng with benevolent and tender eyes. He had won, he had conquered. In his joy he placed a £10 note on the counter and smiling said:

"A toast to his Excellency, the Governor General."

"A toast!" they all shouted.

"For," said Rangoon, choosing his words with precision from the enormous stock at his command, and lifting high his glass: "For he's a pore denuded 'eathen and a fifth class fightin' man."

Quietly Rangoon Rappaport slipped to the floor. He fainted.

The former Miss Evangeline Widdershins, now Mrs. Albert P. Rappaport, turned to her husband.

"My dear," she said, "I have just completed a note of thanks to our kind benefactor, Dr. Aesop Abercrombie. I have explained that it was difficult, in India, to keep a cool head while carrying on, but since I managed a transfer up here to the Yukon, you have frozen your ears twice and got completely rid of that nasty curse. I have told him that not one single line of that certain poet's has crossed your lips since leaving the Hindoo shore. Would you like to add a few words?"

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Albert P. Rappaport brushed the frost from his whiskers and pulled off a reindeer mitten. He accepted the pencil from her outstretched hand and wrote with the carefree habit of a man with a guiltless conscience:

"Dear Dr. Abercrombie: I wanted Gold and I sought it: I scrabbled and mucked like a slave. But I'm happier now, Abercrombie. I've taken my youth from its grave. This life's a bally battle, but this advice holds true, when strange things are done in the midnight sun, just Grin, like Dan McGrew."

Come One, Come All!

We are strong advocates of any science fiction convention, as a wonderful chance to spend a weekend talking and drinking (readers under 21 will delete that last word) with people who talk your own language. (It is rumored that such conventions also present serious programs dealing with the Nature and Position of Science Fiction, but we have yet to find anyone who can give us a firsthand account.)

Naturally enough, we're particularly anxious to advocate the Twelfth World Science Fiction Convention, to be held on Labor Day weekend of 1954 in San Francisco. As West Coast editors, we know what a high percentage of the best writers and most astute readers of science fiction live in this area; and we're hopeful that this may be the most stimulating science fiction weekend yet.

We'll bring you more news later as plans are announced, and tell you which of your favorite F&SF authors will be among those present. Meanwhile the convention needs *your* support; the more early reservations the Convention Committee gets, the more surely it can plan for your entertainment.

So send one dollar now to the Twelfth World Science Fiction Convention, Box 335, Station A, Richmond 2, Calif., and enroll yourself as a member of the convention. See you there next fall!

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"There is a direction science fiction can go," Don Fabun, the astute science-fantasy reviewer of the San Francisco Chronicle, *recently wrote, "where no earthly science dares to tread, yet which is no more 'unscientific' than were stories of radio, television and radiation a scant half century ago. This field, dignified by the name 'para-psychology,' has to do with the forces, unseen but felt, by which the human mind extends its domination over the material universe." That physical domination by the immaterial may take strange forms, as such researchers as Nandor Fodor have discovered, and as Peter Phillips demonstrates in this disturbing blend of psychiatry, fantasy and para-psychology.*

c/o Mr. Makepeace

by PETER PHILLIPS

REGARD LONDON suburbanites. Then abandon the attempt at crystalline classification. The suburbanite tag is the only thing they have in common.

Some commute. Others tend their gardens. The brick boxes of city clerks sidle up close to the fifteen-room mansions of stockbrokers. The party wall of a semi-detached villa is a barrier between universes: in this half lives a sweetly respectable retired grocer; in the other, a still-active second-storey man with a fat and ailing wife and a nymphomaniac daughter.

Sometimes there's a community sense. But more often, neighbours stay strangers throughout their lives.

For instance, no one knew 50-year-old Tristram Makepeace. Not even himself.

British reserve can be a damnably frightening thing.

One morning, in the long, winding, tree-lined avenue in the so-suburban suburb where he lived —

"Hey!"

The postman turned at the gate. Tristram Makepeace hurried down the path of his neat, bush-enclosed front garden, leaving the door of his villa open.

"Not here," he said, and held out an envelope.

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The postman took it, read the typewritten address.

E. GRABCHEEK, ESQ.,
℅ TRISTRAM MAKEPEACE,
36, ACACIA AVENUE.

The postman, blank-faced, looked at the thin, tall, hollow-cheeked bachelor. "That's you, sir, isn't it? And it's your address."

Makepeace drew his dressing gown closer against the chill morning air. His voice was high, with limited range of inflection. "But I don't know anyone named Grabcheek. There's certainly no one staying with me. It's lucky I was up in time for the delivery this morning. I'm not, as a rule, you know."

But the postman returned the letter firmly. "Can't take it back. Sorry. They'd only send it out with the next round. Sure you don't know anyone called Grabcheek?"

"Of course I'm sure. I can't accept delivery."

The postman hesitated, made a slow admission. "It's none of my business," he said. "I usually just look at the address. But knowing you live alone — well, it caught my eye. You *did* accept delivery, you know, just the other day. The name stuck in my mind: Grabcheek. And there was another one before that."

Makepeace blinked pale eyes, disturbed. "But I didn't — I haven't seen anything like this before." He fluttered the envelope.

"Well, I shoved 'em through your door. Right address as far as I'm concerned. Now I've got to get on; I'm behind time already."

"But this is ridiculous. Look here, my man —"

The postman, determinedly preoccupied, duty-bound, snapped the gate shut behind him. "Look under the mat," he said, without glancing up from the sheaf of letters in his hand; and he walked on, leaving ex-Captain Makepeace very much alone in the world.

Makepeace looked under the coir mat near his front door as he went back in. Dust. Blasted dust everywhere in this place. But no letters. Anyway, falling from the letterbox in the door, they couldn't have slid under the mat. The postman was a fool, or mistaken.

But — Grabcheek was not the sort of name one would forget.

He examined the envelope. A local postmark. He held it up to the light through the glass-panelled door. Nothing showed through. Envelope too thick.

Not for a moment did it occur to Tristram Makepeace to open it. He just wasn't the sort of man to open another person's letters. Which should indicate what sort of man he was.

After his inadequate breakfast of tea and toast, he re-enclosed the letter

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in a larger envelope and addressed it to the Post Office in the High Street, with a terse note typewritten on his old portable: "No one of that name here . . . *T. Makepeace.*"

Then he made a few ineffectual flicks at dust. Sometimes he wished he could borrow the vacuum cleaner from the woman next door: a little like tanks they were, the way they mopped up the dusty opposition. But the neighbour just looked at him with a polite "good morning." And he daren't ask her. He went to cash his pension cheque, and re-posted the double letter on the way.

He mustn't worry about the letter. That was a sure way to bring back his old trouble. Worrying. And about nothing at all.

Mustn't worry. He had his house, his pension, his garden, his books, his acquaintances at the local public house.

He went in there, on his way home, spent his pension more liberally than usual.

He told the regulars about his mystery.

"Should have opened the bloody thing," grunted the landlord, irritated with honesty that could perpetuate such a mystery.

"Fancy telling us," said a straight-gin widow, also annoyed. "Now we might never know."

Makepeace looked round the bar. "No one here called Grabcheek, I suppose?"

A shaking of heads.

When he got home that afternoon, a little drunk, there had been a second postal delivery.

E. GRABCHEEK, ESQ.,
℅ TRISTRAM MAKEPEACE,
36, ACACIA AVENUE.

He thrust the letter into the pocket of his old tweed jacket, went upstairs to sleep on the bed he had forgotten to tidy that morning.

He awoke with a dry mouth in the early evening, memories of the day blurred. He put his hand in his jacket pocket. There was no letter. He shrugged.

Mind overlapping itself, Tristram: don't you remember — you posted it back to the post office. . . . Or was that another one? Doesn't matter. Don't worry.

Two days later, Tristram Makepeace, after a night disturbed by dreams of flowers floating over a desert, was up again in time to hear the postman's early double knock.

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Two letters were lying on the dusty coir mat.
One was for:

E. GRABCHEEK, ESQ.,
℅ TRISTRAM MAKEPEACE,
36, ACACIA AVENUE.

The other, officially franked, was for him. It contained the earlier letter to Grabcheek and a note from the local post office: ". . . must inform you that this letter was properly delivered, and we have no authority . . ."

Makepeace did not open either of the Grabcheek letters he held in shaky hands in that dusty hallway.

Don't blame or praise him. He was the sum of what others had made him, and deep, deep, was his dead father saying: *It's just not done to open other people's letters, old man.*

He sent both letters, unopened, to the Postmaster General of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

He got them back from the PMG's secretary's secretary, unopened, with red-tape regrets, on a strange and sunny morning a week later. A covering note of eyebrow-raised politeness suggested that, as the occupier of the villa, he might have a *right* to open them.

Very well.

He would. Blast his father.

Oh no no no he didn't mean that, truly he didn't mean that, what a silly thing to say anyway, and he hadn't said it, really, it was something outside him, something he wasn't responsible for, so touch the wall three times and everything will be all right. Don't worry. Mustn't worry.

Makepeace flung one of the Grabcheek letters on the small table in the hallway. Dust fluffed up and made a sunbeam visible.

He went into his dining room with the other letter and sat down over the remains of his breakfast.

It must be all right to open it. All he had to do was read the sender's address, then post it back "NOT KNOWN."

He opened it. The paper inside was blank.

Makepeace remembered some of his army language. He swore for thirty seconds in his flat, high voice, then ripped envelope and blank sheet into fragments.

"Silly bloody hoax," he said finally, and felt relieved.

He went out into the hall to do the same with the other letter. It had disappeared from the table.

Then Mr. Makepeace, very empty, with time at a dead stop in his blank, cold mind, fell to his knees and patted at the dusty carpet. He breathed dust.

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He got up. "It was there," he announced. "It was there. I know. I threw it there, and I saw it lying there."

He thumb-and-fingered his twitching eyes and touched the wall three times.

Dear father, I love you. Musn't worry.

Of course he hadn't thrown the letter there. He'd taken it into the dining room with the other one, and torn both of them up into tiny scraps, and put them on the big willow-pattern plate.

He went back into the dining room, not breathing very deeply.

There was nothing on the plate, or on the table. No single fragment of paper.

The house was very still.

Of course, the postman hadn't called that morning at all. That was it. The whole thing was a damnable half-dream, one of those partly-controllable dreams, and he always felt sleepy in the mornings nowadays.

But the tingling feel of paper being torn . . . He held himself stiff for a moment, refusing to think, forcing his mind to rare silence. Then, methodically, unhurried, he looked under the dining room table. He looked at the shut windows, fronting on Acacia Avenue. He searched the house; in cupboards, under beds, upstairs, downstairs.

In the coal cellar, he found himself idly turning over pieces of bad-quality coal, watching smooth black shiny surfaces reflect light from the tiny window. He had forgotten what he was searching for.

Half-automatically, army training having been superimposed on a crabbed and tidy childhood, he made his bed — he had forgotten to do it one day last week, and it had nagged his mind terribly — and went to the public house and drank a good deal of whisky. He looked out of the bar window, and talked to nobody.

In his mind there was —

Clum, clum, nick-nock, NO . . . *hibbledy-hobbledy hock. Christ on a thorn tree,* NO; *take a pair of sparkling eyes and see that tree.* MY FATHER DEATH. *Forgive me who's listening. I'm not responsible for whoever puts things like that in my mind, clum, clum, bibbledy-bo, the bastard inflicting this sort of thing on me . . . No, God, I didn't say that, there's a cold clean sweet chopper coming for my head, this way the Rhine, that way home . . . Rune, rune, ruin the rune, if I could master the compulsion the chopper would come quicker they say, or would say if they knew anything, so let it carry on. . . . I won't think, my hands aren't dirty, I slapped him with my right hand when he was drunk because he hit my mother, but I apologised and explained. . . .* STOP THINKING. . . . *Or think of anything, even the barmaid's flabby breasts.*

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Mother . . . NO . . . the ashtray . . . hard.

The glass ashtray on the table in front of Mr. Makepeace slithered over the beer-wet surface and splintered on the composition floor. He felt a little better, treated the publican to a drink, and went home down the tree-lined avenue to his villa and a lunch of sausages and worm-eaten spinach from his neglected garden.

After lunch, he took out his wallet to find the covering letter from the Postmaster General's secretary's secretary. He found nothing but the remainder of his pension, in crumpled notes.

He addressed himself to the wall. "I am not going mad," he said, without emphasis. "I am not going mad."

That was one of the things he had told himself when an unexpected German shell, ravishing the peaceful sky, had burst near him.

When he felt pain in his spine and head, undeserved pain, unfair pain, he had struggled to his feet near the demolished signal post. He had seen his father's big, lined, hard face in the sky, and as he fell back again to the tumbled brown earth, he said, without moving paralysed lips: "That was a dirty trick, daddy. You shouldn't have done that. You shouldn't have hit my mother, the sky. . . . But I am not going mad. I am not going mad."

In the field hospital, sitting up as a nurse washed him, he had clearly seen the back of his own neck. And that night, he had perched on the end of his own bed and watched himself sleeping.

Long lemon-washed corridors, with inset black doors, had presaged his final discharge from His Majesty's Service. Beyond one certain black door a neurologist — or a psychiatrist — or at least a mechanistic psychologist — had told him: "We shall recommend you for a forty-per-cent pension. If you have any more of these subjective — um — experiences in between your half-yearly examinations, just report to the Ministry of Pensions."

A thousand forms weaving through blue-shot air: forms AH 5647/45 (Officer, RAC. Med. Inf., 34), S.O. (Din. 01/16 7896)., Hos. X. (F.P./2333) — S.O. —

And now —

It was all subjective, of course. The Grabcheek letters. The Grabcheek Letters, giving them undeserved caps. Like a book he'd read once . . . What was it? . . . It didn't matter. . . . When his head was clear again he'd reread his whole shelf of belles-lettres. . . . Lamb. Whose Lamb led to what unexplained slaughter?

Sometime, said Mr. Makepeace to himself, with what little was left of his conscious mind, I must distemper the walls of this room again.

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Meantime, he must obey orders.

Write to the Ministry. Ask for an examination. Write now.

Or wait until tomorrow, when he could check with the postman whether he had called that morning.

Now it was late afternoon, with an old, yellow sun putting cheap gilt on the roofs of the houses over the way. Now it was too late to write, anyway, for the last post had gone. Tomorrow would do. Tomorrow would always do.

Now was the time to walk down to the local public house and tell some quite untrue tales of his soldiering days, after taking the edge off his reserve with whisky.

"'*E's quite a character when 'e's 'ad one or two. . . . Lives all alone in Acacia Avenue. . . . Why don't 'e marry? Ask 'im. . . . Always good for a gin, though. . . . Queer old bird.*"

Mr. Makepeace walked into the hallway and examined himself in the mirror.

Old? At 50?

Yes, and tired.

He went to bed.

He waited at his dining room bay window the next morning, watching the slow progress of the postman who seemed to be calling at almost every house on his side of the avenue.

He waited until the postman was about to open his front-garden gate, then hurried out to meet him.

E. GRABCHEEK, ESQ.,
℅ TRISTRAM MAKEPEACE,
36, ACACIA AVENUE.

Makepeace was aware of the cold morning air, the gravel underfoot, a blackbird singing from the laurel bushes, milk bottles clinking together somewhere nearby, the postman's stupid unshaven face; and, faintly, from a neighbouring house, "This is the B.B.C. Home Service. Here is the eight o'clock news. . . ."

"Found out who he is yet?" asked the postman.

"No."

Tristram Makepeace turned back along the path towards his house. It was waiting for him. The door into the ever-dusty hallway was open. It was the mouth of the house, and it was open.

The eyes of the house, asymmetrical windows, were blazing, yellow and hungry in the early sun.

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He wanted to run after the postman and talk with him; or go up the road to the milkman and ask him about his wife and children, talking and talking to reassert this life and his living of it.

But they would think he was mad; and he was not mad. The cold began to strike through his thin slippers and dressing gown, so he walked slowly back up the gravel pathway into the mouth of the house, and closed the door behind him.

He opened the envelope, took out the blank sheet, tore it through. The equal halves fluttered to the floor. He tried to keep his brain as blank as the sheet of paper. It would be nice, came the sudden thought, if he could take his brain out and wash it blank and white and clean under clear running water.

A dark, itching foulness compounded of a million uninvited pictures was trying to force its way into his mind. . . . strike your god, your father, see him stand surprised with the red marks of your fingers on his cheek. . . . and your lovely virgin mother. . . .

"NO!"

He shouted the negation, forced the pictures back, and stood trembling with the effort.

Three times three on this wall, three times three on that wall . . . Keep it down, hard, and if you can't be blank, think blind. . . . If that barrier goes, I'm done for. . . . I need help.

Mr. Makepeace dressed, and sat down at his old typewriter to compose a sweetly pedantic letter to the Ministry of Pensions, asking for an interview by a psychiatrist.

He wrote, in part: "I cannot doubt the objective reality of these foolish hoax letters, since the postman would confirm that I have received them; but I fear that their subsequent apparent disappearance may be the result of short phases of amnesia, attended by false memories, in which I secretly destroy them. . . . Please treat this matter as urgent."

" 'Subsequent apparent disappearance,' " murmured a Ministry clerk. "Oh Gawd." He stamped the letter WRONG DEPARTMENT. PASSED TO MINISTRY OF HEALTH, and placed it in a tray for routine collection by interdepartmental messenger the next day.

On the second day of waiting, Mr. Makepeace's head was numb with the effort of not thinking.

His letter was routed through the Ministry of Health, marked FOR ATTENTION MEDICAL BOARD, DISTRICT E.

On the fourth day of waiting, as Mr. Makepeace sat head-in-hands at his breakfast table, the morning newspaper, which he had not bothered

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to pick up from the mat inside the front door, dropped through the ceiling, and spilt a cup of cold tea in front of him. He laughed.

Now he dared not leave his dusty house, for that would be running away. And he might meet a chance acquaintance who would pity him.

He looked over his shoulder and laughed again, a curious little high-pitched giggle. There were tears in his eyes.

The secretary of the Medical Board, District E, on Form EOH/563, wrote to an Army Medical Board, asking for the case-history papers relating to ex-Captain Tristram Makepeace.

On the fifth day of waiting, thin, proud, foolish Mr. Makepeace, who had no intimate friends, no near relations, no anchor in slipping reality, and no imagination, spent the day walking round inside his house and addressing each face of each inner wall, three times each time, with a new compulsive rune designed to cleanse the inner walls of his brain of an accretion of dust.

On the morning of the seventh day, the woman next door hastily phoned for an ambulance.

Mr. Makepeace, pale eyes quite blank in his gaunt face, was leaning from his bedroom window and screaming.

She made out a few words: "The barrier's down. . . . I can't stand it."

"He must have been fighting that Oedipus-complex-cycle for years," said the Superintendent thoughtfully. "Then — *phut!* — sheer pressure plunges him into psychosis." He looked again at the encephalograph. "A classical schizophrenic overnight."

"Be damned," said his young assistant. "No ordinary schizo — save the mark — ever exhibits such a clear-cut, contrasting duality."

"Which is he this morning?" asked the Superintendent.

"Grabcheek, writing himself another letter care of Tristram Makepeace. The handwriting is quite distinctive. Incidentally, police checked on those Grabcheek envelopes we found in his pockets. They were definitely typed on his machine."

"But no actual letters were found — only blank sheets. So what is he writing now?"

The young assistant stared out of the office window. " 'Your father sends you his best wishes, and hopes he will meet you soon,' " he quoted.

"Poor devil," said the Superintendent. "At least he can't post them to himself now."

The assistant drew a sealed envelope from his pocket. "This was in the mail this morning. We had to pay excess postage because it wasn't stamped."

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E. GRABCHEEK, ESQ.,
℅ TRISTRAM MAKEPEACE,
SEATON MENTAL HOSPITAL,
ESSEX.

The Superintendent jerked upright in his chair. "But how in the name of heaven . . . He's been isolated here for the past week!"

"A self-haunted man isn't bound by the three-dimensional limitations of his main personality. Read a few case-histories of poltergeist phenomena and you'll see what I mean. 'The poltergeist is not a ghost. It is a bundle of projected repressions.' That's a quote from a book you refused to read — remember?"

"Nonsense," muttered the Superintendent. "A dissociated personality cannot have a separate objective existence!"

"According to that book it can," the other persisted. "You might give it a try: *Haunted People*, by Hereward Carrington and Nandor Fodor. Fodor even encountered such dissociations in his psychiatric practise."

"No . . . *No!*" the Superintendent said sharply. "Someone smuggled that letter out for him and posted it."

"Without a stamp?" the assistant grinned. The grin faded.

"It's a damnable theory," he admitted. "The other personality is almost invariably evil. In Tibet, adepts deliberately purge their minds of what we would call neurotic symbolism by projecting *thanai* — thoughts which coalesce into evil spirits, which are then dissipated. Or not."

"And thus," said the Superintendent, "the Abominable Snowman?" He laughed.

At an empty house in a so-suburban suburb that morning, the postman delivered a final letter. It fluttered to the doormat. It was addressed— without the concession of a ℅ now — to:

EZREEL GRABCHEEK, ESQ.,
36, ACACIA AVENUE.

As the footsteps of the preoccupied, duty-bound postman died away, the letter zig-zagged upwards from the mat, poised in mid-air.

Something laughed.

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Though most science-fantasy writers are in New York or California, we get stories from all over the world; and a large number of the most entertaining imaginative speculations to land on our desk recently have been coming from San Miguel de Allende, Mexico. In this small town of the state of Guanajuato, Mack Reynolds has discovered that he can live in luxury even on a pulp-writer's income; and this agreeable sense of affluence seems to be stimulating him to his liveliest flights of fancy. We had thought that Mr. Reynolds had pretty well covered the subject of time travel and alternate continua in such deft exercises as The Business, As Usual *(F&SF, June, 1952) and* The Adventure of the Snitch in Time *(F&SF, July, 1953); but here is yet another adroit variant . . . with a startling footnote to the alternate history of our own Old West.*

The Other Alternative

by MACK REYNOLDS

THE LITTLE MAN brought a bit of paper from an inner pocket and checked it. He looked up at the number on the office building and returned the note to his pocket. He went on three or four doors and then turned to walk past his destination again. On the third try, he made it.

He entered the lobby, took several times longer than was necessary at the directory and finally approached the elevators.

From the side of his mouth the starter said, "Bet he's going to a dentist."

"Or Alternatives, Inc." the elevator boy said.

It was Alternatives, Inc.

The little man got out at the fourth floor and after the elevator had gone set his narrow shoulders and pushed his way through heavy glass doors into a swank reception room.

Miss Myers looked up and did what she was paid to do. She smiled charmingly and said, "Yes, sir?"

The little man took his hat from his head, cleared his throat foolishly and said, "I want to kill Billy the Kid."

Without the smile slipping an iota she checked her pad. "That would be our Mr. Demming," she said. "Who shall I say is calling?"

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He took on courage. "Eh, Smith. Tell him Mr. Smith."

"John Smith?"

Mr. Smith even essayed a feeble joke. "Are there any others?"

Into her inter-office communicator she said, "Mr. Demming? A Mr. Smith to confer with you." She looked up and said, "Mr. Demming will see you immediately, Mr. Smith."

He made his way as directed down a short corridor to the third door, knocked and waited for an invitation to enter.

The invitation was prompt, bubbling with cordiality and a bit too aggressive for Mr. Smith. However, he shook the hand thrust upon him and mumbled banalities in answer to the ones he heard.

"Sit down, sir. Please sit down." Mr. Demming indicated a chair near his desk.

Mr. Smith looked at the third occupant of the room. "Aren't we going to be alone?"

"Excuse me. Let me introduce our Mr. Jeffers. Mr. Smith, Mr. Jeffers. Mr. Jeffers is new with the concern, Mr. Smith. I am helping to break him in to his new duties. I'm sure you won't mind."

Another handshake.

Mr. Smith cleared his throat. "Well, it is a bit personal, you know. If you don't . . ."

"Not at all. Not at all. You mustn't mind either of us, Mr. Smith." Mr. Demming deliberately eluded the point. "After all, this is *your* show. Ha ha. Your money pays for it. You must look upon us as your faithful employees."

Mr. Smith conceded the position rather than discuss it further.

When they were settled, Mr. Demming behind a desk innocent of paper or pen, Mr. Smith cleared his throat again and brought it out quickly. "My psychi . . . my doctor's instructions were to come here and have you make arrangements for me to kill Billy the Kid."

The other nodded understandingly. "Of course."

"I imagine this sounds silly to . . ."

Mr. Demming held up his hand reassuringly. "Not at all, sir, not at all, believe me. I understand *perfectly*."

"Then you can do it?"

"Of course. No question at all. Ha ha. Except, of course, the financial one."

Mr. Smith was on firmer ground. "I've brought cash."

"Excellent," Mr. Demming beamed. "The sum will be $10,000."

"I see. I suppose that there is a guarantee?"

Mr. Demming pursed his friendly lips. "Ah, a partial one. We will place

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you in a position to shoot to death Billy the Kid, known historically as William Bonney, I believe. That we will guarantee. Whether or not you have the determination to do the deed, is, of course, up to you."

"I see."

Mr. Demming held out his hands, palms upward. "Obviously, that is all we can do, Mr. Smith." He turned to his associate. "Isn't that obvious, Mr. Jeffers? Mr. Smith wants to shoot Billy the Kid. We can put him in the position to do so, but we can hardly pull the trigger. If we did, ha ha, then it would not be *Mr. Smith* who was killing Billy the Kid, and, after all, that is what we are being paid for, to let Mr. Smith perform the deed."

It was a little involved but Mr. Jeffers nodded his stanch agreement. "Yes, that is obviously right."

Mr. Smith sank back into his chair and thought about it for a moment. Finally he cleared his throat again. "Very well. but now I want some reassurance. First, if you send me back in time, how do I know I shall ever return?"

Mr. Demming was suave. "Ah, yes. Now, first of all, Mr. Smith, you must understand that Alternatives, Inc. does not exactly send you back in time."

"But . . ."

Mr. Demming held up a hand. "Yes, I understand what you are thinking. How are you going to be able to meet Billy the Kid if you are not sent back in time? You see, Mr. Smith, as far as we know there is no way of traveling in time. However, we are capable, through various developments pioneered by Alternatives, Inc., to move from one space-time continuum to another."

"I . . . I don't believe I follow you."

"Well, Mr. Smith, we have found that there is more than just one universe. In fact, we have discovered that there are an infinite number of alternate universes, or space-time continua, co-existing. A moment's reflection will bring home various ramifications. In short, Mr. Smith, somewhere everything *has* happened, *will* happen, and *is* happening. Everything."

"This is a little hard to comprehend."

"Of course. However, it is true. Somewhere, Mr. Smith, the South won the Civil War and slavery still exists in Dixie. Somewhere, Lee was a northern general and Grant finished his life a drunken panhandler. In some of these alternate universes, the Civil War was never fought. Indeed, Mr. Smith, in some of this endless multitude of alternate universes Columbus never discovered America."

"It's mind-shaking, isn't it?"

Mr. Jeffers put in a word there. "It certainly is."

Mr. Demming rubbed his hands together most businesslike. "The prob-

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lem that confronts us here is to have you switched to another space-time continuum. One very similar to our own, identical, in fact, except that it is roughly a hundred years before the time in which we exist."

"I see." Mr. Smith didn't but the conversation was confusing him.

Mr. Demming pressed the button on the inter-office communicator and said, "Billy the Kid. United States, approximately 1880, I believe. Better have Harry fix up a .38 Recoilless." The communicator said, "Can do," and Mr. Demming switched it off.

He turned back to his client. ' We will slip you into a suitable situation to perform your task, of course."

Mr. Smith was gaining confidence. He said, "Now look here, this Billy the Kid was no half-baked juvenile delinquent. I want some assurance that . . . ."

The other smiled deprecatingly, his hands came out again, palms upward. "Mr. Smith . . . please. Believe me, we haven't lost a client yet. Now then, have you had any experience with firearms?"

"I have belonged to the Midtown Rifle and Pistol Association for the past ten years."

"Fine. Now then, suppose you were to meet Mr. Bonney, Billy the Kid, under the following circumstances: He is intoxicated and quite alone. His guns have been carelessly left in another room. You will be armed with a .38 Recoilless with explosive shells."

'I see. But . . . well, suppose something *does* go wrong?"

"Nothing can. Mr. Smith, we send you back at just the split second when you will find him in the most advantageous situation. You fire the gun. The explosive shell is so powerful as to destroy him no matter where your bullet strikes him."

"But if something *does* go wrong?"

"Then, Mr. Smith, you merely press a small stud, built into the side of the gun. This will trigger the mechanism which will bring you back to this universe, safe from Billy the Kid or any other danger."

"I see." Mr. Smith thought it over some more. He said, "Are there additional charges in the gun?"

"There is no need for more than one, but if you wish."

"You'd better have all six chambers loaded. You would be surprised, gentlemen, some of the things that can develop, even in this — ah, continuum, that you haven't considered at first. Why sometimes I get into situations . . ."

"Yes, I'm sure you do, Mr. Smith, but believe me, this is foolproof." Mr. Demming cleared his throat, realizing that wasn't exactly the way to put it, and added, "Ha ha."

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There was a knock at the door and a newcomer entered with a .38 revolver in one hand, an innocent-appearing flashlight-like device in the other. He seemed bored.

"Ready?" he said.

Mr. Demming said, "Ready, Mr. Smith? Ah, load the other chambers of the gun, Harry."

Mr. Smith said, "Just a moment, now. Let's go over this again."

Mr. Demming said, "It is very simple. Here is your gun. You know its operation, of course. When you say the word we will instantly translate you to an alternate space-time continuum in which Billy the Kid, at about the age of twenty, will be enjoying a drunken orgy, unarmed and alone. You will shoot him, then press this stud on the side of the gun. You will then automatically be returned to this continuum. Clear?"

Mr. Smith took the gun and a deep breath. "Very well," he said.

"Ready?"

"Ready."

The technician switched on the flashlight-like device and Mr. Smith turned hazy, wavered a moment in the air and then disappeared.

The technician turned to leave.

"Thanks, Harry," Mr. Demming said.

"All in a day's work. Don't forget to return that gun as soon as this guy gets back. I don't want it setting around full of them extra explosive shells." Harry closed the door behind him.

"Is that all there is to it?" Jeffers asked.

"That's all. You'll probably handle half a dozen of this type of case a day."

"What! You mean six screwballs come in here every day wanting to kill Billy the Kid?"

Mr. Demming grinned at him. "You think that eventually we'd run out of Billy the Kids, eh? Thank goodness there are an *infinite* number of alternate universes. But that's not quite it. I don't mean that they always pick that one desperado. In fact, their tastes are quite catholic. Last week I had Jesse James killed twice, Bob Dalton once, John Dillinger twice and Joseph Stalin four times. The way they want to assassinate Joseph Stalin is a caution. Also, you sometimes get Neanderthal or Cro-Magnon man and often Robin Hood or . . ."

"Robin Hood! But *man*, he's fictional!"

Mr. Demming said with pleasant patience, "My dear Jeffers, you must realize that when there are an *infinite* number of alternate universes, literally *everything* has happened, will happen and is happening. True enough, Robin Hood is a mythological or fictional character in *this* universe, but in an

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infinite number of other universes he *is*, *was*, or *will be* very real indeed."

Mr. Jeffers shook his head. "I'm not sure I'll ever quite grasp all of the ramifications." He looked down at his watch. "Just how long should this take?"

Mr. Demming shrugged. "Only a few minutes. He's probably gloating over the body right now."

Mr. Jeffers shivered. "So cold-blooded. Of course, I'm not opposed to taking $10,000 from anyone willing to give it up — but how can he possibly do it? And, above all, why should he want to?"

"My dear Jeffers, ha ha, don't question Providence. The psychiatrists are currently going through a most profitable fad — for us. They are of the opinion that patients with inferiority complexes can be cured by finding some idol they have raised in their minds and proving themselves superior to this superman."

"Then Smith . . ."

"Definitely," Mr. Demming laughed. "Probably all of his life he has felt quite inadequate and from boyhood has built up this callow gunman of the Nineteenth Century as the symbol of all that he, Smith, is not. He has most likely always liked guns. Did you note that he has belonged to a gun club for a decade? He probably reads westerns and tunes in horse operas on his TV. Meanwhile, he is constantly developing his complex because he, himself, cannot shoot down Indians by the score, ride horses over the plains, and do whatever the old cowboys supposedly did."

"But shooting this Billy the Kid —"

Mr. Demming looked down at his own watch. "He should be returning any moment now. Ah, yes, the shooting. Don't you see? The doctors are very possibly correct. Through the services of Alternatives, Inc., we are able to allow our Mr. Smith to destroy this super-gunman of the Old West. What better way to remove the feeling of inferiority? To actually shoot Billy the Kid to death!"

"You know, it sounds plausible at that."

"Well, whether or not it is, we get paid well. And, of course, since no one witnesses the event and since it doesn't even take place in our own universe, no laws are broken." Demming looked at his watch again. "I wonder where the devil he is? The instructions were clear enough. All he had to do was press the stud and he would be returned here immediately."

Jeffers said, "Ah, he's coming back now."

A smoky apparition began gathering again in the center of the room, to solidify almost immediately.

But it wasn't Mr. Smith.

There in the center of the office stood a tall, lanky character with a star

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pinned conspicuously to his vest. The .38 Recoilless was in one hand, a long-barreled Colt in the other.

"What . . . what . . ." sputtered Mr. Demming, upsetting his chair behind him as he scrambled to his feet.

The newcomer's eyes went from one of them to the other, then slowly about the room.

"So the little feller wasn't spoofin', eh?" he drawled. "Tell you the truth I didn't really cotton to that story he spun about alternate universes and everything when I caught him. But I reckoned I'd oughta be fair and press this stud when he said it'd prove his yarn. . . ."

He looked them up and down. "Name's Garrett, Sheriff Pat Garrett, Lincoln County. You gents are under arrest, accessories to murder."

"But what . . . what could *possibly* . . ."

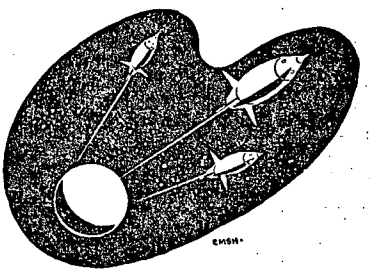
Pat Garrett's soft voice registered self-deprecation. "'Twasn't really nothin'. Just managed to shoot this here fancy gun out of the little feller's hand, not hardly a minute after he shot poor Billy."

The sheriff scratched the bottom of his chin with the fore sight of the .38 Recoilless: "Course, I was after the Kid myself. Woulda caught him, too, ifn it hadn't been for yore Mr. Smith. But shootin' a gent down in cold blood is still murder and I'm taking you two back to stand trial with the little feller."

Mr. Demming had recovered to the point where he could attempt to regain control of the situation.

"Ha ha, sheriff," he said, "this isn't really your jurisdiction you know. I'm afraid that might be a bit difficult."

The eyes of Pat Garrett narrowed. "Oh, I don't know, gents," he said, thumbing back the hammer of the Colt. "Now, I'm giving you exactly five minutes to make the arrangements."



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A firstrate TV writer plagued by sponsors who "don't believe in fantasy," Doris Gilbert likes to turn for refreshment to the short story, where she can freely use fantasy devices to cast light on certain fields of human activity. In The Chocolate Coach *(F&SF, January, 1953), she used time travel to afford a brilliant picture of the theater, present and past. Now she employs a sort of metempsychosis — the transfer of souls — to illuminate the world of artists and art dealers and to tell a moving human story with a problem which 57th Street can never solve.*

Arrangement in Green

by DORIS GILBERT

Do you know who I am? Who I really am? My body was fished out of the East River on June 9, 1950. I died, to all intents and purposes on the seventh, wilfully, of drowning. I say "wilfully of drowning" because, technically, I'm not a suicide — not in the exact sense of the word. You see, I'm still around. I only got rid of my own body, the body that went around under the uncelebrated name of Joe Brand because nobody would ever give a damn about or spend any money on or sing out the praises of Joe Brand unless he were dead.

Oh, they dug me up all right. They had to. I saw to that. They exhumed the mortal remains of Joseph M. Brand from Potter's Field, lifted him up tenderly and carried him all the way to beautiful Woodlawn Cemetery and the Mayor made a speech and the Museum of Modern Art commissioned an abstract in marble, a harmonious mass of non-objective forms with my name chipped out in it — so I now had not only a dignified grave, but one with a monument on it. And I stood by, in striped pants and a morning coat with a flower in my buttonhole, and watched it.

You might say, in order to bring this about, in order to take a starving, unknown artist and make a Great One out of him, it became necessary for me to swipe another body to walk around in. The body I now inhabit is still walking around. It looks just like a Man of Distinction. It *is* a Man of Distinction. In fact, it was one of the first those whisky-makers latched onto, several years ago — Harry Everson, Dealer in Art, sitting on his Noguchi

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desk, in the inner office of the Everson Galleries on 57th Street, with a long tall glass in his hand.

But I want to talk about Joe Brand, because I'm not telling this out of braggadocio or because I happen to have pulled (with certain help) the neatest trick of any millennium. I'm scared, I'm frightened, I'm still insecure and I've got to prove something. I'm scared and I'm frightened because it may be too late to prove it. I want to get back to Joe Brand.

When I was Joe Brand.

I was 38 years old and hungry and disappointed and gifted and tired. I'd been an artist since I was ten. Even then, I was sold, body and soul, lock, stock and barrel to the Fine but Unfruitful Arts. I wouldn't have it any other way. It never occurred to me to paint cover girls or design wall paper or work for Disney or do whatever a lot of other talented men may do to keep body and soul and sanity together. But then, I couldn't. As I said, I had already given body and soul and sanity away. I was good — that was why. Really good. If you believe in the trashy phrase "Selling Out" (which I don't) — I couldn't sell out. It wasn't mine to sell. It belonged on canvas, the way I saw it, with everything I had.

Now that's fine. That's good. That's epic and it's noble. It may not be the way it has to be but it is the way it should be. You can't quarrel with that.

And being a modern, Twentieth-Century man, formerly an East Side slum kid, self-taught and well-taught, I didn't have any illusions about what my lot was. Matisse was one in a million to live to a ripe old age and enjoy the fruits of Fine but Most Commonly Unfruitful Art. There were twenty Van Goghs for every Matisse — unwept, unhonored, unsung until the shovelful of dirt in the face could make them immortal. Dead, therefore deathless — what a paradox!

I thought about it a lot but I accepted it; how, now, today with no Court composers, it was even tougher on men who wanted to write great music. An artist could sell a painting once in a while. I never heard of anybody saying, "Here's a hundred bucks; I'd like to buy your sonata. . . ." Mostly, I accepted it. Once in a while, I'd rebel — usually after I'd sat around with the one other artist I knew (I don't like to run with the pack; it's like talking to yourself; there's something incestuous about it) and I'd come back to my little room with the good north light and the sweating coldwater walls and I'd do a Tom Sawyer. I'd try to figure out how I could have the game *and* the fame. I wanted to come to my own funeral and hear them crying. I wanted to hear some new, young artist compared to Joe Brand. And, being formerly a Lower East Side kid who could fully appreciate this — I wanted to eat, too.

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But as far as I knew, or anyone knew, barring a Matisse, a Wagner, a Goya who happily belonged to a wealthy king who went in for that kind of thing — you had to be dead to be discovered and gone to be great.

Once, right after I finished "Arrangement in Green" (recently sold by my own hand to that Pasadena collector for $75,000), I stood back and looked at it and wondered what the Hell to do with it and I thought about maybe if I could do a hoax. What kind of hoax did I know of that had worked? There was the European artist who went around painting Old Masters and selling them as such, who had to make like Rembrandt, who could never be himself. There was little Chatterton in the Eighteenth Century, the poor little teen-age kid pretending his poems were written in antiquity by an obscure monk so they'd pay some attention to him. And all the attention they paid him is they broke his heart and he died only eighteen years old.

No, I wouldn't try anything. I just stood there looking at my "Arrangement in Green" and in love with it and enjoying it and proud as Hell until it got dark and there was no light to look and my head ached. Anyway, that night I was too excited to eat so I went out and got a pint of gin.

I was 38 years old and tired of living only I wasn't tired of painting when one word on the front of a magazine showed me what to do.

It was the issue of *Time Magazine* that had Arthur Godfrey on the cover and one word beneath his picture: *Empathy.*

I remember picking it up in a barbershop and looking at it and wondering, "What the Hell is empathy?"

So I looked it up.

The article was all about Godfrey and it said he had empathy for millions — empathy meaning the power of projecting yourself *into* other people. It was more than sympathy; it went right *inside.* It seems that most creative people have it. Actors, of course. Writers, which explains their particular personality problem. When you have ten heads it's hard to know which one is supposed to make up your mind!

I sat there staring at the printed page but all the other words had vanished. All I saw was *Empathy.* That morning a woman had come into the gallery down in the Village where "Arrangement in Green" was hanging and wanted to buy it for $65. I told the dealer to tell the woman what she could do. I needed that money in the worst way but it griped my soul. Someday, somebody else was going to pay a fortune for it. Someday, it would belong to Ali Khan's grandson or the President of the United States or they'd loan it to a museum on Mars and send it over on one of Brinks' specially bonded spaceships. And I'd be gone. I'd be nothing. *What would it mean to me?*

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Well, I thought, maybe it wouldn't be so tragic if I believed in reincarnation but suppose I came back as a sturgeon? The barber at chair number three was telling me, "You're next!" when I thought what a magnificent thing it would be if I came back as my own dealer — kind of a Lord Milbank in the Twenty-First Century. Half a million dollars for one medium-sized Joe Brand!

"You're next," barber said. This time I heard him.

I shook my head *No*. "I'm supposed to look like I'm a starving artist. No wonder they call them Les Fauves."

The crazy ones. The wild people. Zip-What-Is-It? I closed the copy of *Time* and threw it down and it landed face up. That word just lay there, staring back at me from the cover. *Empathy*.

I went back to my room and started remembering. That's how I work — from memory. When I'm out in the field and I see something, I never make sketches because they never do me any good later on. Too flat. Too black-and-white. Nothing is black-and-white. I think in color: how the light falls, how light is life and with tone on tone you can build into dimensions. That day in my room, I kept walking around, remembering. There were the things I had seen on Easter Sunday in the Puerto Rican section on 116th Street. I remembered the festive six-year-old kid prancing around in his big brother's shirt. The shirt had been all different colored stripes. He looked like he was swallowed up in an awning, but the light — the pride and the glory in his small, pinched face — was something to behold. The colors had been wonderful.

Easter Sunday. I started to paint it from memory but that's all I had when night fell. Memory. Sharp, clear and forceful. But *I* couldn't do anything.

Into *whom?* I wanted it here and I wanted it now — but project myself into *whom?* Who was the best and the biggest and the classiest art dealer in America? Who had the connections and the know-how to give it to me, Joe Brand, right here and right now? Harry Everson. Anybody knew that. Harry Everson could take a painting some chowder-head in the nut-hatch had painted with his big toe and get any one of the Forty Biggest Bank Accounts to think it was good and buy it. If he wanted to! But people like me couldn't get to people like Everson. I knew I couldn't get to him. But I wanted like insanity to get *into* him! If my mind or soul or whatever my stuffing was could be transplanted inside of Harry Everson, I could force him to do what I wanted.

I hadn't eaten in two days. Not much, anyway. Light-headed. Floaty. I floated uptown on the subway and got off at 57th Street. I drifted like a goddamn cloud suspended over the pavement or like George Price's Levi-

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tated Man, through and around and past the crowds, airborne into the Everson Galleries. I didn't even know why I came there or what I was going to do. Formless. Harry (suddenly, to me he was *Harry!*) was showing Miros this week and I wasn't the least little interested. I guess I wanted to see Harry.

I saw him. What an expensive-looking character! So smooth you could skate on him! That cold, too — under the charm, in the brain, back of that wonderful, wooing voice. He was talking to a woman in a beat-up hat and an outsize vicuna coat, with several sets of six figures written all over her. They were standing in front of a Miro: four kindergarten dots and a comet's tail in vermilion.

Oh, shuffle off this mortal coil! Oh, get out of my skin, before it's too late, my love! Transplant me, Daddy! *Let me be him.*

"That's the funniest idea I ever heard of," somebody said at my elbow. "Imagine wanting to go jump inside somebody else's *head!*"

It was a low voice; a throaty one. A couple of keys higher than Tallulah's. It belonged to a woman, but I was afraid to turn around and look at her. I just stood there deliberately not thinking anything. My mind got stuck. Just then, a secretary or somebody came over to Harry Everson with a glass of water. He looked at his watch, reached into an inside pocket and took out a golden pill box. Probably a small Cellini. He took a couple of pills, smiled his thanks with a ravishing smile at the secretary, took the glass of water and took the pills.

"Nitroglycerin," said the voice at my elbow. "He takes nitroglycerin."

"Huh?" I couldn't help saying, still not looking around.

"He isn't trying to blow himself up," she said. "He has to take it to live. He's got a terrible heart. Would you want to have that, *too?*"

"As long as I know he can afford the nitroglycerin," I said. "He can afford closets-full."

I didn't ask it to but my head turned to look at her. The balance of me was sweating all over, oozing like the walls in my room. Cold ooze. I turned and looked, hoping there was nobody there. She was a nice-looking woman — not very young. She had a high-bridged nose, umber-colored eyes, darker hair worn smooth and she had on a slender tailored suit and was carrying some refined-looking furs. She didn't even look like anything special. She didn't answer any of the descriptions commonly ascribed to she-devils.

"It's no funnier my looking like this, than it is you wanting to turn into Harry Everson so you can make yourself famous," she said, and walked over to one of the pictures on exhibit. "Miro," she said and curled her lip. "*Nothing.*"

Two days of no food. All that aggravation in the morning about the

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woman who offered sixty-five bucks for one of my better paintings. I still felt weightless, afloat, like somebody had slipped my moorings. Directionless. The only way I knew to go was over to her.

"Why don't you try it?" she said. "Try it now."

"Try what?"

"You know. For size. See if it works."

"How do you do it?"

She shrugged one shoulder a little. "You just do it."

Harry Everson was still talking in low tones to his vicuna-coated customer. Actually, I didn't feel like I was in myself anyway. All day I had been leaving myself, more and more. I said something silly to myself like, "Get on your mark! Get set. . . ." and I didn't even feel a jolt when Harry Everson said to the woman in the beat-up hat, "But have you ever seen a *Joe Brand?*"

When he said it, I was standing there, superimposed over him, looking into the shiny pince-nez of his well-heeled client. And as soon as I was back again (it only lasted about half a minute), he was looking like *he* had been jolted. He worried an eyebrow, pulled at his collar, puzzled. Some kind of double talk had just spewed out of his mouth and he had no frame of reference for the source. You could see it. It was written all over him.

"A *who?*" the woman with him said.

"Uh, some of the Paul Klees," Harry Everson said, not covering quickly.

"It's too temporary this way," the she-devil said to me. "It can't possibly do much good. You know yourself you'd have to be gone. It won't do to shuttle!"

"What are you trying to do," I asked her, "go Biblical on me? An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth? You making bargains?"

"Don't you think $75,000 for 'Arrangement in Green' is one Hell of a bargain?"

"In Hell or out of it?" I asked her.

In the cool, lime-green light just before dawn with the air very still and very warm even for June, I stood on the embankment just below Sutton Place. Harry Everson lived in one of the buildings above me. He was there this minute and he was about to have another heart attack. Lucifer's lady relative had done some whacky-looking designs with a compass on a piece of map-paper and said this would be the time to do the switch, after which she kindly went out of my life. She explained that when Harry was about to flicker out was the time for me to flicker in — easier, of course, and neater, not so messy, if I didn't try to get in dragging a 148-pound load by the name of Joe Brand.

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I was now about to drop that load. The light was lime-green all around me and the river below dark-green, oily and Stygian. It was kind of that El Greco green in "Outside Toledo." There was the gray pile of buildings back and above me and Welfare Island out there looking like a dungeon. Even with my body on I was traveling light. I wasn't leaving any family to speak of: an uncle and a cousin, not even here. There wasn't any woman to speak of either, to say goodbye to silently now or regret. I was dedicated. I had known right along that with me it was better to burn than to marry. I was leaving my paintings, but I knew where they were, every last one of them, and I'd go and get them myself, sitting behind Harry Everson's chauffeur when the time was right.

So lose the body! And don't lose time. . . .

I jumped.

The body went down but I wasn't with it when it hit the dark green water. By that time, I was Harry Everson choking for breath while the doctor gave me the nitroglycerin in the veins. It seems I just missed the last gasp in the oxygen tent in the fission of a second, but I managed a genuine, authentic Harry Everson smile for the doctor before I went to sleep, relaxed and exhausted like the brand-new born.

The next morning when I was having my breakfast (they said I slept for more than twenty-four hours and the nurse said I smiled as I slept) I thought what an even deal had been made: a soul for a soul and a body for a body. I gave up the body and Everson the soul, provided he had any, I wouldn't know, but I seemed to have inherited all of his acumen as soon as I was able to be up and around and think things through.

My timing couldn't have been better. I waited several weeks until after the unidentified man had been fished out of the river, shedding no tear when I knew they were hauling him off to a pauper's grave after he spent the necessary amount of time checked in at the morgue. I bided my time by unloading several Utrillos to a millionaire who liked Modern, although not too modern, and one Franz Hals to another who still thought the past was a better investment, for a smashing price. I went to parties and was astounded at the number of beautiful women who doted on and phoned and invited a man with a blown-glass heart. Once I even achingly regretted the sturdier skin-and-bones of poor Joe Brand who never came across anything like this in his monk-in-the-cell-don't-get-off-that-bread-and-water life. But the deal had been done and I knew it and until the right time came, I would have to be bored in a jail of another kind.

The right time came. I just happened to be poking around in the gallery down in the Village where "Arrangement in Green" was still hanging. It just happened to catch my eye and I asked about the man who painted it.

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The man who painted it? Name of Joe Brand. I said I'd like to talk to him. They didn't think that was possible right now. He hadn't been around in a long time. He used to camp on the doorstep — must have gone out of town. Any idea where he went? They didn't have any but now they cared terribly because Harry Everson was asking it. The biggest search party you ever saw was sent out hunting for Joseph M. Brand, not only because of "Arrangement in Green" but a couple of others the dealer in the Village had stuck in a packing box down in the basement and the wealth of paintings, the whole stinking plethora stashed away in every conceivable corner of the little empty room with the good north light. There would be more discovered, later on, naturally.

Dealer Searching for Missing Genius.

Oh, the tears they spilled in all the papers! Oh, the spread in *Life Magazine* after some brain at Headquarters put two and two together and they remembered about the man they dragged up out of the river, bloated and purple on June 9!

Dead and discovered. Gone, therefore great!

I let them drool for a good six months before I put the first Joe Brand up for sale. I sold them all the Picassos they wanted. If they wanted Renoirs, it was okay with me. But Brand — I was so crazy about him I wanted him all for myself. I put up a shrine in the Galleries, a permanent room for Brand. I kept it locked. Every so often, if an art collector got down on his knees and begged me and bought enough other stuff, I'd personally open the shrine and come out with a single Brand. (One Kohinoor diamond against Tiffany velvet.) Don't breathe so hard. Papa spank! You can look but you mustn't touch!

I wasn't in any hurry. I wanted the price to go up. And it could and would go up and up and up — because I wasn't ever going to run out of Joe Brands. I could always go and hide myself some place and paint some more.

So after six months of torturing the more lecherous collectors, I unlocked the shrine and gave a cocktail party. I gave a sensational spiel. I was a selfish old soandso. I was a dirty mean skinflint. How Scrooge could I get? Keeping all of that beauty, all that emotion, all of that genius, all to myself. I didn't have the right. Now, I hurt so hard in the conscience, I couldn't live with myself anymore.

"Still Life No. 3," "Face in the Window," and "The Harbor" were up for sale. What about "Arrangement in Green?" Please, I've got a weak heart! And no taking home tonight, because tomorrow the entire exhibit is being thrown open for the public — high school teachers and lovers holding hands and shabby-looking young men in rump-sprung pants and

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thin young women, too pale with too much lipstick on — to devour with their eyes. Joe Brand painted for *them.*

That part of it was true.

I looked around the room for the she-devil. I don't know why I expected to see her. She had said she wasn't going to show any more. I knew she planned on collecting her commission, but now obviously wasn't the time.

There was too much work to be done. I had a scare thrown into me the night of the day that the Brands were opened to the public, with more newsprint about it than even the original Harry Everson could have dreamed of. I had a heart attack, the first one I, personally, had experienced. The doctor said it wasn't nearly so rocky as the last one, so I had to take his word for it. All I know is I felt like Joe Brand must have felt when he went down and down and his lungs began to burst although I wasn't, strictly speaking, present at the time. But the doctor said not to worry, my state was static as compared to last year, no better but certainly no worse.

So I was able to get on with the job of doling out Brands. I continued to part with them reluctantly and the greater the reluctance the bigger the price. I still held onto "Arrangement in Green," knowing there was the woman in Pasadena who would murder her children to get it. I wanted her to reach the state where she'd garrote her grandchildren.

The pictures were going, one by one. It would become necessary for me to discover additional Brands. But that wasn't the only reason I rented a loft in the warehouse over on Tenth, so I could add to the glory of Brand, posthumously and in secret.

You see, you can't stop it. You can't hold it down. When you've got something in you, you can't make believe it isn't there. You can't tell it to go away and it won't exist in a vacuum. It's got to go someplace and it must. I was bursting with ideas. Hundreds of them. And they wanted out — on canvas.

Everson was still Brand.

I was haunted and held and possessed most of all by "Easter Sunday," the kid in the awning-striped shirt. It was already hanging in my mind, alive and complete, finished and framed. I had disposed of whatever business I had at hand and had already told my assistant that I was going to Virginia for a week, planning to shack up in the loft, when the telegram came from the woman in Pasadena. For "Arrangement in Green" she was not only willing to strangle her grandchildren, but if she couldn't come by it honestly, she'd cut my throat in the bargain.

I flew to the Coast.

When I got back, the Museum of Modern Art wanted a loan of the whole collection. Joe Brand would have killed me if I turned that down, so there

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were more days lost away from the easel waiting for me in the loft on Tenth.

And all this wasted time, it kept building in me and building. I was getting sick of publicity stunts and phoney baloney and art gallery gobbledygook like Representational, Non-objective or Blue Period or Green Period or Pink Period. I was sick of dishing out double talk like Form, Emotion, Design; like "This is something you don't just look at once, this is something you'll live with for the rest of your life!"

I didn't want to live with it the rest of my life. I was getting awfully edgy. I wasn't even polite the other day when Grafton, my assistant, asked me if I'd look at some work done by his wife's cousin's niece, a girl they felt had great promise. The girl had nothing and I said so. I was furious. She had nothing but because she had the right connections she could get an appraisal from Harry Everson. Joe Brand had sweated his heart out and he had to go dive in the drink before Harry Everson would even look at him.

Those days I was taking the nitro like popcorn. And I thought if I didn't get to my secret studio and shut myself up with my work, I'd die.

I got to the studio. I had to. What set it off is yesterday morning some stubble-faced stumblebum with holes in his elbows came to the galleries and insulted my secretary and began yelling at the top of his lungs so everybody could hear him that he was the real Joe Brand, that wasn't Joe Brand they buried and they never proved it and he could and he was going to sue the world!

He was raising such Hell that I had to come out of my office and have a look at him. At first, it struck me funny that he didn't look anything like me. Like I looked, I mean. He had some ratty-looking unframed canvases under his arm.

I told him to come in my office and bring his paintings with him. For a moment there, I had this curious, queasy tremor. Maybe he *was* Joe Brand. Maybe the transmigration didn't stop with from Brand to Everson — maybe the lady devil had worked out a triple play and this was Tinkers to Evers to Chance.

Well, I knew this was ridiculous and I shook it off. I looked at his canvases. The sad part of it was, they weren't bad. He did have talent. But they weren't Joe Brands.

"Why don't you stand on your own?" I told him. "You can paint. But you're not Joe Brand."

"How do you know?" he said. His face was gray and his mouth hung slack but misery burned bright in his eyes, misery and longing and hope. He looked me straight in the face with everything he had ever been and all that he wanted to be.

I took one of his paintings. A street corner at night. A blowzy tart under

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the street lamp. In the background, two young soldiers against a building, looking. I propped the picture up on my desk, then I went and stood next to him and grabbed him by the arm.

"I know because I know Brand. And he wouldn't have painted it like that. What you've done is good but it's cheap. You squeezed a lot of color on your palette and it came out black. It's too black. You've hit so hard you missed the point. Brand wouldn't have painted that woman like that. He wouldn't have put those kids in the background. He would have let the light come toward her like this . . ." I picked up a pencil and started to sketch. "He would have let it come softly, with love, so it would find some attitude, some expression in her face, or the way her hand clasps her purse . . . to show some real humanity, the young girl inside of the blowzy tramp. She's waiting for some guy to pick her up so she can eat, but she's waiting for something else, maybe. . . . And you'd do it like this . . . and this . . . in the composition. . . ."

I had been sketching as I talked, crouched over the desk. I could feel him breathing on my neck, watching.

"I don't see any difference," he said. "So you took out the two soldiers. You're not an artist . . . how the Hell would you know?"

I crumpled up the sketch and threw it on the floor. I took his paintings and heaved them at him.

"Get out of here," I said.

"You're a liar," he said. "And a forger. You forged my name to some fuzzy stinking sentimental semi-abstracts. And I'm not getting out."

I lunged to push him out the door, the pain radiating like lightning from the middle of my chest, down my arms and through to my back, when the cop came and took him away.

Throw the bum out, he's breaking my heart! What had I proved? The sketch had been lousy. It had gone all wrong. I shouldn't even have tried it. I never sketched anything. I always worked directly with the paint. I couldn't even show that fake how good Joe Brand really was.

Was I really good?

I used to know. Even now, with all the critics, did I really know? Critics, even good ones, can get carried away. They've got tear ducts too, like anybody else. You open their veins, they bleed too. I opened their veins and made them bleed over a starving suicide-artist. Harry Everson made Joe Brand.

He did like Hell! I gulped some nitro and got out of the galleries. I took a cab to Tenth Avenue and got in front of that easel up in the loft.

"Easter Sunday." The beauty in the squalor. The glorious kid in the hand-me-down shirt. The thing that is born again and again.

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I painted all day and all night. I couldn't stop. I painted blind, crazy, and I knew that it was wonderful.

I finished it this morning and collapsed. Dead, tired sleep. What woke me up was a piece of a dream. It wasn't a whole dream. Nothing really happened. I just saw the woman demon walk briskly down an empty street.

"Easter Sunday!" I got up and looked at it. In the full light of day.

It wasn't wonderful. It was terrible. It was nothing. It wasn't Joe Brand. It was the work of Harry Everson — an amateur! *Joe Brand's talent went down with Joe Brand.*

So now I'll never know. Was I good? Was I really good? I've been staring at that mess on the easel for a long, long time. I've been thinking of what one dissenting critic said about me. He said you couldn't tell about me yet. A picture has to hang a long time in the gallery of the gods. It takes the quiet, the perspective and the clarity you can only get with Time.

I had a big jolt about half an hour ago. That's all right. I'm going to walk over to the subway and go downtown and all the way to the end of the line and at eight o'clock when I'm supposed to take them, I won't. I'm leaving my little gold pillbox right here on the easel. I'm going to try some empathy into time — Real Time. The only way to know is to wait it out.

The Newest from the Best!

We're especially proud of our March issue (on the stands in early February) because it features two of the most gifted writers in — or indeed out of — the field of science-fantasy: Alfred Bester and Ray Bradbury. The newest story from Bradbury, who has won wider general recognition than any other recent imaginative writer, is called *All Summer in a Day* — a poignant episode among the children of the first colonists on (surprise from old Mars-Hand Bradbury) Venus. Bester, who last year enthralled science fiction readers with THE DEMOLISHED MAN and captured the general audience with his bitter TV satire "WHO HE?", gives us a long novelet curiously titled *5,271,009* — a novelet rich in ideas as unexpected and provocative as its title and one which, while telling a thrilling story, goes to the very core of the meaning of science fiction itself.

This issue will also include short novelets by Roger Dee and Anthony Boucher; another of Manly Wade Wellman's ever-welcome tales of John the ballad-singer; the first F&SF story by one of our favorite living writers, Shirley Jackson; and F&SF's detailed annual survey of the best books of the preceding year.

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No reader of science fiction or fact needs any notes on the identity of the literally and figuratively prodigious Norbert Wiener; but you are probably less familiar with the name of W. Norbert. This by-line Dr. Wiener has adopted for "the stories I publish for the pure fun of it," as distinguished from his work as an objectively observant scientist. This story, which first appeared most unexpectedly in MIT's Tech Engineering News *and was kindly called to our attention by Groff Conklin, marks "W. Norbert's" first appearance in a science-fantasy magazine — the first, we trust, of many, since he writes with grace and charm, tells a deceptively simple tale of the interaction of prayer and scientific research, and concludes with a most pointed moral. Wiener, it is obvious, adopts his pseudonym not only for his own pure fun, but for the delight of all of us.* (NOTE: *the casual reader may think that the initial* W. *stands for* Wiener; *but the devotee of Sherlock Holmes will discover in the story one unmistakable clue to indicate that it clearly stands for . . .* Watson!)

The Miracle of the Broom Closet

by W. NORBERT

EVERYBODY HAS HIS own Mexico. For some it is seafishing in Acapulco with the usual photograph of the fisherman and the fish. I believe the fish take as much pride in the photographs as the fishermen, only under the ocean things are turned upside down, and the pride of the fish is in the weight and size of the American who appears beside him. Others sit on the lawns at Cuernavaca and bask in the sunshine. I suppose that on weekdays they are prominent leather manufacturers from Mexico City or famous doctors; but I have merely seen them in their basking costumes with their wives and children up from the City in play suits of Jim Tillet's black patterns. I am told that there are even a few people in Mexico who go up Popo, and a slightly smaller number who come down again. However, I do not wish to assert what I have not observed with my own eyes.

For me Mexico means none of these. Instead, it means a severely formal and efficient building, with plumbing painted in three different colors, and

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the universal odor of the experimental laboratory. It means working with a friend of mine who is a physiologist, and who will not be named in the sequel for reasons that will appear obvious. It means a highly energetic and competent group of young men of various nationalities, who are not averse to playing occasional tricks on one another, and who pursue their several careers as physiologists, chemists, and other varieties of scientists. There is also Sebastian.

Sebastian is the janitor. I do not mean to imply in the least that he is an ordinary janitor. In fact, he is the janitor to end all janitors. When I first met him, he was possessed of a flowery conversational style, and two equally flowery moustachios. The moustachios, alas, have passed into history, although I suspect them of having been stolen by one of the younger chemists. The style is still there.

When I first met him, Sebastian was only able to be flowery in one language. As a matter of fact, the general question asked in the laboratory when a new article is to be turned over to the press is, "Is this the way that Sebastian would have said it?" Since then, with the ebb and flow of foreign and largely North American scientists, English has become the second language of the laboratory, and Sebastian can manage to be quite as dignified in it as he can be in Spanish. He holds very high opinions as to the responsibility and the conduct of "international scientists" and speaks reverently of them.

Sebastian is thus an internationalist, but he is not himself an unnational being. He is most definitely a Mexican, and a very devout one at that. There is a Shrine in the broom closet, not unlike the portable affairs that Mexican chauffeurs carry around with them on the front window; and I need not tell you that the Saint to whom he prays is his namesake. I don't mean that there is not a portrait of the Virgin of Guadalupe somewhere in the Shrine — that would be too much to expect of a patriotic Mexican — but the main figure is that of a Roman soldier pierced through and through with arrows and looking very uncomfortable under the circumstances.

I must now report to you a sad event which happened some few years ago, and almost caused the disruption of our flourishing little institution. It all goes back to a visit the Boss paid to the National Pawn Shop. Why the Boss should visit the National Pawn Shop is more than I can understand, but I believe that it was under the pressure of some of his wife's American friends, who had heard there were to be found there rather remarkable opportunities for the purchase of Colonial jewelry. However, one of the lots to be auctioned off seemed to consist of a miscellaneous collection of hardware, and to be so little in demand that it was going to be knocked down at a ridiculously low price. There is always a need for odd bits of metal around a

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laboratory, for clamping the different parts of an apparatus together; and as about fifteen pieces of miscellaneous junk were to be knocked down for half a peso, the Boss couldn't resist the need of supporting the financial interests of his laboratory.

Most of the stuff was no use to anyone — it consisted of a few things that looked like picture frames, some miscellaneous brass work and a few bits of junk jewelry — but there were some iron rods which caught my friend's attention as just what he needed for the assembly of his new oscillograph. The oscillograph is located in the back of the room just opposite the broom closet I have mentioned, where the janitor keeps his washrags and brooms, and performs his private devotions.

It is the part of the ideal scientist to keep a magnificent impartiality in his decisions; but although this is so, in a long career extending over 40 years and three continents, I have never met the ideal scientist. The very least he wants is to get publishable results, and what he usually wants is to show that Professor So-and-So of the University of Patagonia has made a fool of himself in his last paper. Much as I admire my esteemed Mexican colleague, I cannot acquit him of a full measure of human frailty in such matters. He is quite as capable of chortling as the next man, and his long and successful scientific career has given him many occasions to chortle.

In the period in which this tale is laid, Professor Halbwitz, formerly of the University of Spiesburg, and now a refugee at the University of Patagonia, had presented a paper concerning nervous conduction which contained some features highly obnoxious to my friend. The dispute began with the fact that the Patagonian scientist used a certain German make of amplifier, while the Mexican scientist swore by an American amplifier which a friend of his had constructed. At any rate, there was a marked discrepancy between the results of the two men. For a while, my friend put it down not only to the other fellow's bad instrumentation, but in particular to the electrodes he was using. I may say bad electrodes or polarized electrodes are the continual excuse of the electrophysiologists.

Before long the whole laboratory knew that the combat between their director and Herr Professor Halbwitz was a grim battle to the death. The less respectful youngsters had heavy bets on the outcome, weighted decisively, I may say, by the fact that their boss had almost always come across in the pinches. On the other hand, as becomes a man of dignity and substance, the janitor, our Sebastian, was unable to relieve his emotions in such a trivial and undignified way. The Boss over whom he watched, the Boss who was a national asset of Mexico, the Boss to whose office he had often brought the bootblack and the barber — much, I may say, to the Boss's embarrassment — not only could not be wrong, but by some sort

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of contradiction, he needed the full support of Heaven in not being wrong. Far be it from me to expatiate on the fluency of the prayers which went up to Saint Sebastian. Neither the fluency of Sebastian's Spanish nor my own linguistic abilities permit me to do justice to the subject. At any rate, the first results of this devotion were most gratifying. The Mexican electrodes seemed to work perfectly, and the American amplifiers were all that a committee of Edisons could have wished. The paper proceeded flowingly; it seemed as if H. Halbwitz was doomed to be swallowed into the outer darkness in which he belonged.

Convincing as the results of our laboratory were, they appeared to have no effect whatever on the stream of publications arising in Patagonia. In one article after another, Herr Professor Halbwitz continued to maintain his indefensible thesis, and the controversy went on for a period of months. By this time somebody in the Morganbilt Institute in New York began to be intrigued by the blank opposition between the results of the two scientists. He was an old friend of the Boss, and we had full confidence that the results of our laboratory would be completely confirmed. We got a most apologetic letter from the Morganbilt Institute, in which our friend, Dr. Schlemihl, confessed himself unable to duplicate our results. He supposed that there had been some misunderstanding on his part about our setup, but as far as his work went, it seemed to be distinctly on Halbwitz's side. A long letter from our laboratory did not improve the situation. It appeared that Schlemihl's understanding of what we had done had been perfectly correct. It was really a nasty situation, because the controversy came to take on a rather personal tinge, and there wasn't anything we could do about it. An article appeared in an Argentine newspaper commenting on the corruption of Mexico by North American contacts, and declaring a national mission of Argentina to be at the lead in all branches of science and intellectual effort. This was followed by a rather chauvinistic article in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, casting doubts on all Latin-American work.

We still kept getting the same results. The Boss began to look more and more strained. I don't know how we could have kept from an explosion if just about this time a totally new and unexpected piece of work of his in an entirely different field had not come off, and saved the reputation of the laboratory. Still it was a close thing; and to this day the name of Halbwitz is not to be mentioned in the laboratory without a certain feeling of humiliation.

It was only the other day that we got our first clue as to where the difficulty really lay. The Boss was looking a little more carefully over the collection of junk that he had bought before throwing it out as utterly useless.

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In the bottom of the box, between two flat pieces of metal, there had sifted down a little slip of parchment, indicating that the box had been the property of an old Mexican priest who had excavated some of the material in the neighborhood of one of the early churches. This church was devoted to Saint Sebastian, and the priest offered as a theory, perhaps not too well substantiated but perfectly probable, that the pieces of metal he had dug up were relics; in fact, probably some of the original arrows of Saint Sebastian.

I don't know just the process by which the engines of the death of Saint Sebastian acquired special miraculous powers, but we have the True Cross as a prototype, and relics are of the most diverse character. The miracle of Joshua, when he made the sun stand still, was a really good-sized one; but within the frame of science there are minor miracles as well. Now, to upset scientific experiment at all requires a very small miracle indeed, and with a devout and faithful servant praying to Saint Sebastian in the direct presence of his arrows, what can one expect? After all, as we understand it, the Saint was a Roman soldier, and the very special needs of the modern scientist must be well beyond him. The needs of an eloquent and faithful though simple soul are matters much more suited to his comprehension.

We have no complete evidence that this is what happened. However, since then I have noticed on the part of the Boss a distinct disinclination to use any material emanating from a quasi-clerical source. I don't think he is any more religious than he was before, but he is very much annoyed, and last year when there was a question of hiring a fellow by the name of Sebastian as laboratory boy, the youngster lost the job. And I am very sure I know why.

At any rate, the moral of this little tale, if there is any moral, is that saint and scientist should each stick to his own business. Meanwhile, the janitor Sebastian flourishes, and I believe that in his self-satisfaction he is beginning to grow his moustachios again.

Note:

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Daniel F. Galouye is on the copy desk of the New Orleans States (*sister newspaper of the nationally more celebrated* Times-Picayune); *and like so many science fiction writers, he somehow manages to produce in part-time more fiction than most professionals could create in full-time. Since his debut less than two years ago, he's sold seventeen stories, mostly novelets and short novels. His F&SF debut shows that he's developed into a fine craftsman of storytelling. Here he takes the ever-fascinating theme of the telepathic mutant, explores more terrifyingly than ever before the implications of* involuntary *telepathy, and casts his tale in the form of a breath-taking, hard-punching, relentlessly compelling suspense story that reminds us of the best* Black Mask *thrillers of such pulp masters as Cornell Woolrich.*

Sanctuary

by DANIEL F. GALOUYE

HALF TRIPPING on the curb, Lois stumbled forward, regained her balance and plunged on into the shadows of the next deserted block.

Away from the area of yellowish illumination that lay like a fog over the corner, she slowed her pace and turned to cast a desperate glance behind her.

Her heart was pounding. Her breathing was shallow, rapid. Her hands were clenched into small, tight fists that trembled as she held them close to her sides. Alert, frantic, she listened with more than her ears; tried to pierce the darkness with more than her eyes.

(. . . *babe like that . . . alone . . . this neighborhood . . .*)

It was *his* I-stream! There was no one else around.

As she turned to flee again, she caught the faint sounds of his quick but cautious stalking footfalls — the real sounds, not reflected impressions from his stream of conscious perception.

But she forced herself not to run . . . couldn't excite him into premature action. She turned the next corner. Out of his line of sight now, she raced forward, springing on the soles of her shoes so the high wooden heels would not betray her.

(. . . *like classy stuff . . .*) She caught the lustful undertones that came with the impression. (. . . *really built . . .*)

The hateful thoughts grated against raw, exposed receptors of her brain

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like sandpaper on a bared nerve fiber. Her face twisted in pain, but she refused to throat the scream of agony.

Terrified, she glanced back. Under the corner light he was motionless, staring intently ahead — a huge, muscular figure, the sinews of his stout forearms and biceps bulging as he stood with his fists on his hips, listening. He seemed to realize suddenly that she was running and he lunged after her.

(. . . *good!* . . . *alley ahead — next block* . . .) The piecemeal impressions from his I-stream knifed into her brain like torturing bolts. She screamed — low, ineffectually. (. . . *brass knucks* . . .)

A background of indefinable, obscene picture-images came through, accompanied by unspoken words she had not heard before.

Then, (. . . *going to be sick* . . . *can't he drive this damned cab any faster?* . . . *LIGHTS, CAR AHEAD!* . . .) It was a multiple I-stream now. (. . . *Hour and a half more* . . . *damned hack back to the garage* . . . *night's sleep* . . . *DAMNED BUT SHE CAN RUN* . . . *so sick* . . .)

She reached the corner just as a cab, with a single passenger, turned and drove past.

She stopped, started to shout out to the driver. But it was too late.

The excruciating threads of thought continued to beat into her brain like splinters of agony.

The cab's lights flashed on her stalker. He was walking now.

(. . . *gotta be careful* . . .) It was his singular thoughts again. (. . . *alley only a half-block* . . . *not a police car* . . .)

She crossed the street and turned the corner in a frantic burst of speed. As the cab passed him, she heard his hard heels pound the pavement in pursuit.

Lights ahead! Red and orange neon that spelled BEER and BILLIARDS and splotched the sidewalk with patches of color that seemed to hold back some of the gloom and menace of the night.

The eager pursuer was close now. But a flood of torment in the form of new thought impressions was beating at her tender receptors. (. . . *nothing but a small pair — trying to bluff* . . . *goddam drink ain't got enough whiskey to* . . . *IF SHE GOES IN I'LL WAIT RIGHT* . . . *no-good warped cue stick* . . . *SHE'LL THINK I'M GONE; THEN SHE'LL COME OUT AND* . . .)

Sobbing, she tried to shut out the thoughts. If only there were lids over the receptors that she could close, as she closed her eyelids! but it was no use!

The man inched forward, staying close to the buildings, half-hidden in their shadows.

Why had she come into this deserted section? Why had she decided to

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come to the city at all? She had been warned. She had been told what it would be like if she ever went close to — people . . . a lot of people. She had shuddered at the thought of needles of pain that she could not keep out of her brain — only thought impulses, but sensations which wracked her as vehemently as though they were hateful whiplashes. Such impulses would always produce the excruciations unless she could learn to shield herself from them.

She was in the deserted section because she had planned to come here after getting off the train; because she had rationalized that only here — only in the dismal, uninhabited surroundings — would she be safe from the thought range of others until morning came and she could dash for the Foundation.

Determinedly, she concentrated. The thought lashes seemed to lose some of their sting. For a while, until her resistance was swept aside by mental exhaustion, the assaulting I-streams would be deprived of some of their razor edges.

Hesitatingly, she stepped through the open doorway into the barroom.

Immediately, the vocal blatancy decrescendoed and silence moved over the room in a wave from the bar on her left to the farthest billiard table.

But the hush was only a background for the soundless impressions of obscenity and sensuous abstractions that were like tongues of fire licking at the depths of her mind. Some of the thoughts were duplicated in the half-heard whispers that came from salaciously smiling lips.

(. . . *whatta shape! She's put up like* . . .) That one from the bartender. She could tell. There was a certain synchronization between the thought-words and the motions of his eyes, his changing expression.

(. . . *most like to hole up in a hotel with* . . . *SHE'LL COME OUT* . . . *baby! what a doll!* . . . *SHE JUST RAN IN TO BE SAFE* . . . *wonder how* . . .)

Despairingly, she stood inside the doorway. The impulses were violent! Relentless! Now, however, she was able to hold off some of their sting. But what would happen when she tired of the intense concentration that was her only resistance?

She had to get away! She had to find solitude! Frantically, she looked out the door. The man outside was dimly visible in the shadows across the street . . . waiting.

"Come here, baby." It was a vocal sound this time.

A hand caught her roughly — its touch conveying, nevertheless, a pretense at tenderness — and pulled her toward the bar. "Whatcha drinkin'? I'll buy yuh anything."

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This new threat was huge too, his face red, his eyes dull, his breath redolent of alcoholic fumes. And, as though his laying claim had settled an issue, he stared arrogantly at the others around him. Normal sounds returned to the barroom.

But the assaulting I-streams continued to thrash at her consciousness.

The shirt-sleeved man smiled clumsily into her face. "Give her a double bourbon, Mack. . . . Say," he dropped a callous hand on her shoulder, "you ain't looking for a place to bunk, huh?"

"N — no," she stammered.

Outside, her stalker crossed the street, heading for the shadows along the near sidewalk. Her frantic eyes followed his movement through the open doorway.

"That is — yes," she amended. ". . . Maybe."

The drunken man put an arm around her and pulled her closer.

Her eyes cast wildly about and she stifled a scream. But the nearness of the brute was a horror that was dwarfed by the I-streams which beat furiously at her brain, paralyzing normal response.

He laughed insipidly, released her and tossed a jigger of whisky into his mouth.

In the mirror, Lois looked in stark disbelief at the disarranged blonde hair that lay against the shoulders of her black coat in clumps and knots; the terrified expression in her eyes; the lines of her mouth, drawn with apprehension — pain.

The man gagged on the drink, spat in the bar gutter and wiped his lips against a dirty shirt sleeve, his whiskers making a coarse, grating sound. "Cancel the drink, Mack."

He took her roughly by the arm — principally to hold on to her for support, she imagined — and staggered out of the bar.

(. . . *lucky sot* . . .) The relentless I-streams continued to thrash her conscious. (. . . *MAYBE I OUGHT TO FOLLOW A WHILE . . . slip in extra ace now, or wait — ? . . . get some coffee first — sober up some* . . .)

"I got a place a couple of blocks up this way, honey," he said, slipping an arm around her waist and starting up the sidewalk. "There's a coffee shop along the way. . . . Say, you're pretty young, ain't-cha?"

The composite I-streams from the barroom faded into a restless buzzing as they reached the corner. Mentally exhausted, she decreased her level of protective concentration. But she had forgotten about the man in the shadow of the building and the drunk with her.

(. . . *hardly more than a kid, but what the hell* . . .)

The thread of thought exploded like a fire-bomb in her brain. She half-sobbed, half-screamed.

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"Something wrong, baby?" He squeezed her waist tighter.

(. . . *FOLLOW A BLOCK OR SO — MAYBE HE'LL . . .*) The fragment of the burly stalker's thoughts from half a block behind her was a hornet's sting, but she quickly reestablished her determination to resist.

"There's a man following me," she complained.

Cursing, her escort spun around, pulled a knife from his pocket and lumbered after the other, who turned and ran.

Lois fled in the opposite direction, relief flowing over her like a cooling draught as she escaped the thought ranges of her pursuer, the infuriated drunk, the crowd in the barroom.

But she sobbed as she ran. . . . She *had* to go back — back to the house far out in the country which was the only setting of all the memories she had.

But she *couldn't* quit now! She had come so far! Her flight had been like racing across a scorching desert, having forgotten how far she had come from the oasis and not knowing but what the forest with its cooling stream was only on the other side of the next dune.

Should she turn now and race back over the hundreds of torturous miles she had come — back to the sanctuary of her isolated home where she would be lonesomely but painlessly alone? Or should she continue on with the meager hope that she would find help and understanding at the Foundation?

If only morning would come! Then she could make her final dash over the last few blocks. She would blurt out her story and they might give her an injection that would force sleep and bring release from the indescribable thought agonies which she couldn't endure.

Dawn stirred a chilling breeze and she wrapped her coat tightly about her, rising to stand shivering on the loading platform at the side of the silent warehouse.

Pale light silhouetted the nearby skyline of the city's central section. A horn sounded dismally from the speedway only two blocks off. Somewhere in the distance a truck rattled harshly as it bounced over a grade crossing.

Lois closed her eyes and shuddered. These were the sounds of an awakening metropolis — grim omens that augured the barbarous tortures of the day. The still shadowy city lay like a sleeping monster — sleeping, but even in its lethargy, malevolently plotting the gamut of torment that it would hurl at her.

But she must face the anguish with the hope that she could survive long enough to reach the Foundation — an island in a hurricane-whipped sea. There they had studied other manifestations of the mind — effects similar to the ones she experienced. Only there could she possibly find help.

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Abruptly she realized she had acted unwisely in pushing farther into the sanctuary of the deserted, thought-less section of the city during the night. She should have defiantly faced the minor tortures in order to stay close to her destination, where it would have required only a brief spurt to reach the Foundation as soon as it opened.

With hesitating steps, she walked numbly down the center of the street toward the speedway. Even now her mind was vibrant with the ominous whisperings of a thousand thoughts in the stirring city — strident but soundless I-stream utterings that were still below the threshold of intelligibility.

She clutched her coat lapels with one hand and thrust the other into her pocket; felt the small square of cardboard. Withdrawing it, she read the name — Morton Nelson — and the address.

Would she find him at the Foundation? She remembered his eagerness on learning aboard the train that she was going to the place where he worked; how he had offered help. But she had become reticent. Otherwise, she would have had to say, "I hear voices in my head." People don't ordinarily utter such phrases to a person they've just met . . . not even if that person is an amiable, garrulous ex-rancher-turned-psychologist from Texas.

The sun was rising when she turned on the sidewalk of the speedway toward the city.

(. . . *goddam early job* . . .) The first of the day's thought-stream impressions jabbed at her mind unexpectedly and she winced as an automobile sped by.

(. . . *if I average 60 . . . in Kington by noon* . . .) A car raced past in the other direction.

(. . . *I'll quit; that's what I'll do . . . ram it down his throat . . . ball game if I get off early enough . . . ought to break his damned neck* . . .)

Grimacing, she clenched her fists in her pockets and shuddered as the flow of cars passed. The stabbing thought-pains weren't yet unbearable. But then, the day had only started.

Should she give it up, she wondered, and find a secluded spot to await the night so she could take the train back to her country home? She dismissed the suggestion with a revulsive tremor as she considered the neurotic thought-congestion of the station's waiting room and ticket office — the bedlam of impressions that had sent her plunging into the streets on her arrival.

(. . . *not bad! . . . wonder what she's . . . I can take the day off* . . .)

Brakes howled and a car pulled to the curb next to her. "Hop in, sister," an effusively smiling middle-aged man called out the window. "I'll give you a lift in."

(. . . *good looker, too . . . Joe'll have a vacant cabin* . . .)

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Lois looked the other way, walked faster. She received the mental impressions of disappointment, indignation, then resignation. (. . . *Oh, well . . . lot of work to do anyway . . .*)

The car lurched off. She caught the unspoken expression of vilification, obscenity.

The I-streams were beginning to grate pitilessly on her conscious now. She must begin resisting them earnestly. But the realization came with a sense of desperation. Where she had hoped that she would be able to ward them off for a longer period today, she was finding that their effects were straining toward an unbearable intensity almost immediately. Was it because she had almost exhausted her capacity to resist them yesterday?

With determined concentration, she quelled the harsh impressions until they were but a whisper. But it was only a meager security that she felt — for trying to shield her mind against the I-streams was like trying to concentrate on a difficult, boring problem — the thread of consciousness invariably wandered from the objective.

A cab drove by slowly and she hailed it.

"Do you have the time?" she asked after she had gotten in.

"8:32."

She sighed, relieved. The Foundation would be open by now.

(. . . *wonder what the pitch is? . . . looks innocent . . . can't never tell . . . Sadie's place . . .*)

She tried to close her mind to the strong lecherous impulses which she knew on the basis of their immediacy were originating from the cab driver. But even with the most intense mental resistance, she was unable to ignore them. The range was too close, the thoughts too powerful in their harsh obscenity.

Each thread of his I-stream was a painful barb that thrust up from the background of a thousand babbling thought-voices — hateful expressions, oaths, lewd exclamations, neurotic ravings.

It was a maddening abstract-imbroglio that swirled around her, stabbing inward from all directions like a thousand lances — all composing an invisible aura of vindictiveness, detestation, aggravation, discontent, prejudice.

And where there wasn't the almost universal vituperation and profanity, there was the general undertone of unbearable anxiety as scores all around her shared their worries with her — forced their harassing mental plagues on her. It was like being compelled to consider a hundred personal problems simultaneously — none of which she could be sure, in her distress, was not her own.

And each silent thought-word that fought the thousands of others for

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precedence was, in itself, an individual spear of pain. Would she never find release — be able to shield them out? Could the Foundation help her learn how, so that she might live with people, not have to run away from them like a frightened animal? After all, wasn't she like other humans . . . physically, at least?

The cab swerved sharply onto a main street and entered a congested river of traffic.

Lois closed her eyes in desperation. The Stygian chorus had already reached its climax; was mounting to an inevitable anti-climactic superfury. God! Would the incessant barrage of nerve-twisting anguish never stop?

Frantically, she clutched her face with trembling hands.

(. . . *crazy fool . . . get the hell outta the way . . . stupid, damned cop . . . I'll be late . . . haven't made a green light this morning . . . lunatic woman driver . . .*)

Horns blared endlessly. Shrill whistles grated against her nerves to add to the maddening admixture of normal and supernormal sensations. She sobbed convulsively.

(. . . *dame's off her nut . . .*) "Something wrong, lady?" the driver asked misgivingly. (. . . *either hopped up or . . . maybe dangerous . . .*)

"I'll be all right," she stammered. "Just a — a headache."

"Oh." (. . . *headache — like hell! . . . looney-house case . . .*)

She was aware the cab had stopped and the stream of traffic hadn't moved forward for over a minute.

"Where are we?" She clenched her hands as though the physical exertion would produce the extra measure of mental application necessary to fight back the I-streams.

"Fourth and Allington."

Only five more blocks! She knew — she had studied the map so that she would have an almost instinctive knowledge of the city in case she should be too distraught to think clearly.

"Why can't we go ahead?" She sat on the edge of the seat.

"Jam up there. Looks like a couple of them bumped fenders."

(. . . *DON'T LIKE THE WAY SHE'S ACTING . . . stupid cop . . . BEAUTIFUL BUT NUTTY . . . Aw, go to hell! . . . SHE COULDN'T EVEN WORK FOR SADIE . . .*)

It was an irresistible flood now, bringing unbearable pain.

(. . . *be late . . . the hell with him . . . MAYBE SHE'S DRUNK . . . somebody ought to knock his damned teeth . . . BUT I DON'T SMELL ANY ALCOHOL . . .*)

All interspersed with a thousand simultaneous expressions of obscenity!

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The pulverizing phrases, biting words seared through her brain again and again, like myriad excruciating electrical shocks. There was no holding them back! No resisting their vehement effects!

Lois screamed. She leaped from the cab and lunged onto the sidewalk, raced in the direction of the Foundation.

But there were hundreds all around her — pushing, barring her progress, staring at her, assaulting her mind with their punishing thoughts.

I've got to hurry, she thought — *got to get to the bank to make that check good.* No! That wasn't her thought! It was someone else's! She pushed a slowly moving woman out of her way.

(. . . *stupid blonde . . . run this way, baby . . . she could fall, and I could pick her up and I'd hold her and . . . bounce, bounce — nice, nice . . .*)

Her ankle twisted under her, but she stayed on her feet and raced on. She *couldn't stop!* She had to . . . *catch the downtown express; there was that deal waiting.* No! She screamed. She didn't want to go downtown! It was someone else — not her. She was —

. . . *'Roger Van Ness,' I'll say, 'that's who I am'; and when I enter Kaston's office I'll say . . .*

But she couldn't be Roger Van Ness! And she wasn't going to any office! Who was she?

. . . *Arthur . . . Betty . . . Rose . . . John . . . Lottie . . .* A hundred names lunged up like braille on a smooth surface, as though coming involuntarily from the subconsciouses of the I-streams.

But she wasn't any of those! She was . . . *Lois!* That was it! Lois Farley . . . And she was going to —

. . . *the office . . .*

. . . *home after a tough night's work . . .*

. . . *to get a quick cup of coffee before checking in . . .*

. . . *out on a damned good, stiff drunk . . .*

She screamed and staggered on. She didn't know *where* she was going! There was only the compelling urgency that forced her to race forward. She had to find some place where she could think independently!

Broad marble steps paralleled the sidewalk on her right. At the top of the steps were two arched doorways flanking a third, larger arched entrance. Stretching skyward above the dark-brick edifice were two cupolas and a spire.

She lunged up the steps and raced in.

As though she had stepped through a sound-deadening curtain, she was out of the fantastic thought-world immediately. There was a quiet solemnity about this new place that seemed to force back most of the unbearable

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magnitude of thought assaults. Dazed, she surveyed her new surroundings, staggering farther into the interior. The I-stream rumblings died down as she withdrew farther from the congested sidewalk.

She was in an almost deserted church. Long rows of dark-stained, dimly-lighted pews stretched on either side of her toward the altar.

(. . . *Mary, full of grace* . . .)

She stiffened. The church wasn't empty!

(. . . *God, please help me and grant* . . . *one candle in memory of Fred, dear Fred* . . . *most Sacred Heart of Jesus* . . .)

There was a handful of persons — kneeling in the pews, or at the altar rail, or before the candle racks.

But there was no unbearable sting to the impressions from their I-streams! Gone was the vehemence, the hate, the anxiety that had characterized the secular thought which had almost completely crushed her on the outside. There was a peculiar timbre of dolor, of gentleness that typified these new impressions.

Lois sidled into a pew halfway to the altar and sat in detached silence.

(. . . *God, forgive me* . . .) This impression from close by. She recognized its origin as the blonde girl kneeling immediately in front of her. The girl — wearing a black dress much like her own — nodded her head to accentuate poignant thought-words in her desperate reflections. (. . . *didn't mean to kill him* . . . *but baby coming and* . . .)

Embarrassed as though she were intentionally, surreptitiously listening in on another's bitter distress, Lois tried to turn her attention forcibly away from the contrite stream of consciousness.

Abruptly, she realized she was no longer receiving impressions from persons within the church. The meek thoughts, of low intensity, could be shielded out! It was as though they lacked the strength to insist upon being received.

But still the sinister rumblings from the mad world outside continued to reverberate within the depths of her mind, seemingly as though to remind her that they were waiting for her.

She cupped her face in her hands and sobbed softly. How like a trapped animal she was! Outside was a hell she couldn't survive — not only because it wrought an irresistible, no doubt fatal, excruciation, but also because it robbed her of her identity and purpose so that, if she ventured out, she would be utterly lost without a sense of personal being.

Toward mid-morning, there were perhaps two score persons in the church, most of them occupying pews near the altar. She increased the intensity of her determined resistance to shut out their personal thoughts.

But she relaxed from the mental exertion almost immediately, realizing

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she would need her strength if she was to try to reach the Foundation before the day was over. So she moved to a pew at the extreme rear.

(. . . *child . . . distressed she looks!* . . .) This I-stream from close by! (. . . *almost all morning . . . perhaps if I spoke with* . . .)

She looked up. A black-robed figure, staring sympathetically at her, was coming down the aisle on her left. Nervously, she squirmed out of the pew (. . . *timid she looks!* . . .) and crossed to the other side of the church (. . . *frightened — actually frightened* . . .)

She couldn't talk with anyone now! Had to conserve her strength! She slipped into another pew and moved to its far end — deep in the shadows.

(. . . *later, not now . . . do believe I'd scare her off completely* . . .)

The priest turned away hesitatingly.

(. . . *God, make him come alive again . . . didn't mean . . . kill* . . .) Then there came the impression of the blonde girl sobbing in a nearby pew. (. . . *don't want to go on living* . . .)

Almost angrily this time, Lois shut out the single stream of remorsefulness.

At noon, even the hushed solemnity of the church no longer was the sanctuary it had been earlier — when the throngs on the street were comparatively thin. Now, as thousands darted about during their lunch hour, their composite I-streams were a thunderous din that beat through the thick masonry of the walls.

Lois' features twisted in pain. She hid her face in her hands so her torture would not be observed. How long would it last? She tried to pray. But her will was not her own to dedicate to even that simple task.

Desperately she fought to maintain her identity, to prevent the loss of her own I-stream in the greater mass of warped, twisted, confusing consciousnesses that punished her with their thoughts of anger and greed, trickery and lust, selfishness, envy, hate.

When she was sure that she must surrender to the unbearable assault, the attack began diminishing. Shortly after one-thirty, she was able to relax, somewhat, her shield of concentration.

At 3:30, when the intensity of the impressions seemed to be at a minimum, she went trembling to the big doors. . . . *Now* she must make her dash for the Foundation, less than four blocks away! She stared out onto the still crowded sidewalks and winced. And their I-streams seemed to lunge up derisively to slash at her.

The composite thought impulses were an invisible cloak of madness.

Falteringly, she went down the steps.

(. . . *blonde like that coming out of church . . . what the hell does she have to pray for?* . . .)

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Shaking violently, she turned toward the Foundation.

(. . . *damned stinking Jew . . . another thousand bucks won't be missed any more than the first eight thousand . . . oh, hell, another runner . . . wonder if she's on the make . . . Maud'll think I'm out of town tonight . . .*)

Foundation — church — Foundation — church, Lois repeated over and over to herself. She must firmly imbed in her conscious the only two places where she would be safe. And she must fight the violent impressions. She couldn't let herself be drawn again into the fatal depth of lost identity among the I-streams!

She had to . . . *find an appropriate anniversary present for the little woman.*

"No!" she shouted, breaking into a run. A score of heads turned to stare puzzledly at her as their direct thoughts of wonderment added to her utter confusion.

"Foundation — church," she muttered. "Foundation — church —"

She stumbled, half fell; steadied herself against a light standard.

"Foundation — church — Foundation — *beauty parlor* — Foundation — *stock exchange* — church — *the corner lounge to meet Bill* —"

Throwing her hands over her face, she screamed. "Church! Church!"

(. . . *to the dentist . . . the bookie joint on the second floor . . . to the redhead's apartment . . .*) The phrases expressing destinations seemed to rear prominently among the incoming impressions.

"CHURCH!" she screamed, turning around and racing back.

Then she was stumbling up the steps and into the dim, candle-smoke-scented interior; staggering toward a pew close to the altar. But she altered her course and went over to a shadowy pew deep in the right wing of the building.

Here was sanctuary. Here, the voices were barely a whisper. Here she could rest — until . . . ? Until night when she would have no choice but to return to the insanity-provoking railroad station and buy her ticket back home, where she would live hermit-like until she died — as her father had. Only he had had her to live with. She would have no one.

She tried to fight the simmering I-streams with mental rejection, but it was a sleep of exhaustion that locked out the harassing thoughts as she lay on the hard wood of the pew.

(. . . *Hope she isn't ill . . .*)

Lois was aware of the weak thought as she awoke to the insistent shaking of a gentle hand.

Terrified, unable to remember immediately where she was, she sat up with a lurch.

"Don't be frightened, child. It's all right."

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She turned and looked into the benevolently smiling face of a short, stout priest. But his smile changed to surprise. (. . . *same girl who was here almost all day . . . wonder*—? . . .)

Determinedly, she shut out his thoughts. It was not hard to do when there was only one mind to fight. And she shrank involuntarily from him, rising.

"It seems we have here a young lady in difficulty." He fingered his chin as his smile returned.

The stained glass windows, robbed of their back lighting, were lifeless now. Through the huge door was darkness — and silence broken only by the occasional far-off sound of a horn. Bitterly, she realized it was hours past the Foundation's closing time.

"Of course," the priest continued good-naturedly, "we look with pleasure upon those who visit with the Sacrament. But, unfortunately, we must close the doors at 10 o'clock."

"I — I'll leave. I didn't realize it was so late." She sidled out of the pew and turned toward the rear of the church.

But he caught her arm lightly. "You're in trouble, child. Can you tell me what's wrong?"

Hesitating, she bit her lips, shook her head.

"Then will you tell me how I can help?"

"There's nothing — nothing." She continued on toward the exit.

He followed. At the door, he stopped her again while she stared cautiously out.

"If you have no place to stay," he offered, "there's a convent only a few blocks away. The Mother Superior is rather nice. I don't think she would mind —"

He left the sentence incomplete, waiting for her reply.

She scanned the almost deserted street. At the corner there was a single taxicab with its driver using a sidewalk telephone. In the next block a young couple leisurely windowshopped. The lonely thoroughfare held out a stark contrast to the maddening hell that had flailed her there only hours earlier. It would not be difficult now to get back to the train station. Now there were no throngs whose thoughts would torture her and usurp her identity.

But she gasped suddenly and turned to the priest. "What time is it?"

He stepped out on the sidewalk to glance up at the clock on the spire. "Three minutes till 10."

Sudden terror clutched at her chest. The only train that could take her away from the city would leave at ten! She would never make it! And she would be trapped here for another entire day!

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Remembering the horror of the previous night, she shuddered.

"I do think it's best that you go to the convent tonight," the priest suggested. "And tomorrow, if you like, we may talk."

Numbly, she nodded.

He cupped his hands around his mouth and turned to the cab driver on the sidewalk. "Murphy," he called.

"Evening, Father." The elderly man touched his cap visor as he came up.

(. . . *wonder what he wants? . . . knows I'll be at the Holy Name meeting tomorrow . . .*) Lois had been concentrating on excluding the priest's thoughts. So the driver's I-stream had slipped through.

"Will you take this young lady to the convent?" (. . . *she'll be all right there . . . until morning, at least, poor child . . .*)

In resisting the driver's thoughts, she had lowered her guard against the other mind. Sighing, she abandoned her resistance. Anyway, like the thoughts in the church, they were harmless. And she was much too numb to care.

Murphy took her arm and led her toward the cab. "See you tomorrow, Father," he called back.

(. . . *doesn't look like the bad kind . . .*) She knew he was studying her obliquely as he opened the door for her. (. . . *just like Elaine . . .*) The tenor of his thought told her Elaine was his daughter.

She leaned back in the seat and thrust her hands in her coat pockets as he drove off. And again she felt the card with the name "Morton Nelson" on it.

Suddenly she wondered whether *he* could help. He worked for the Foundation as a research assistant. She had gleaned that much from his mind. On the train, she hadn't wanted to confide in him the true nature of her interest in the Foundation. For some reason, she had feared his reaction might be one of inordinate amusement — perhaps even embarrassing ridicule. But now she was desperate!

Lois leaned forward on the seat. "I wish you would take me to this address instead." She handed Murphy the card.

"But . . ." (. . . *Father won't like it when he hears about this . . .*)

"It's not what you think," she said defensively, hurt.

He turned at the next corner; said nothing. And the thoughts, which she didn't want to hear anyway, were drowned out as they passed a loaded bus — lost in the stinging mass-assault of other consciousnesses upon her mind. She whimpered and shrank in the seat. Then the bus was behind him and she was free once more. But she kept her mind closed against Murphy's reflections, not wanting to face the erroneous accusations she might find there.

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Minutes later, she stood hesitant before Morton Nelson's apartment, her hand raised to knock.

An impertinent thought-image of gigantic waves washing across a beach welled in her mind. The waves disgorged a multi-armed marine monster that lumbered across the beach in pursuit of a man clad in pajamas. . . . She raised her shield of resistance and shut out the vision of someone's nightmare.

(. . . *and in Washington . . . before the House Un-American . . . turn to page four . . .*)

She knocked.

An impression of partial resentment came. (. . . *second interruption . . . calling at this hour? . . .*)

The door opened.

"I— I —" she began, swaying.

(. . . *who? . . .*) "Lois!" He stood there perplexed, his large frame dominating the doorway, the paper hanging from his hand. He surveyed her appraisingly, unbelievingly. (. . . *some kind of trouble . . . wonder —? . . .*) "What happened? You look like —"

There was disbelief on his angular face as he looked down at her rumpled clothing, her disheveled hair, the absence of cosmetics. And the fragments from his I-stream reflected his bewilderment.

"May I come in?"

He took her by the arm. She made no effort to hide the fact that she was trembling. He brought her to the sofa.

"I cheeked," he said. "You didn't show up at the Foundation." (. . . *won't ask . . . she'll tell . . . guess that's why she's here . . . wonder where she went after the train . . .*)

"I — I'm hungry."

He frowned, expectantly silent. (. . . *God, she is in trouble . . . looks starved . . . eggs in refrigerator . . .*)

"I couldn't get to the Foundation. I had to spend the day in a church four blocks away."

He stared at her. She caught a patch of a mental image that showed him calming her, letting her cry against his chest.

"I almost went crazy today, Mort. I — it's more than extra-sensory perception. I receive thoughts — everybody's in the vicinity. At the same time. I can't shut them out. I couldn't get to the Foundation because the pain of the thoughts, the thoughts themselves, kept making me forget who I was, where I was going."

He started. (. . . *kind of deal is this? . . . psycho case? . . .*)

She sighed in resignation. "What kind of a deal is this; maybe she's a

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psycho case," she repeated. "I don't get the complete thought-stream, just snatches."

He gasped. (. . . *trick!* . . . *impossible* . . . *she can't be a — telepath!* . . .)

Lois looked away. "It's a trick," she said in a montone. "It's impossible. She can't be a telepath."

He jolted, backed away. (. . . *I had a dog* . . . "*Fuzzy*" . . . *years old* . . . *see if she can repeat that!* . . .)

"You had a dog. Its name was 'Fuzzy.' You thought something about an age. I don't know whether it was your age when you had the dog or the dog's age. I missed something in there."

She looked guiltily at him. "Sometimes I can shut the thoughts out — when there's only one or two persons. But they're overpowering in a crowd. I can't resist them."

Lois paused. "There's somebody close by — in this building, I guess. He seems to be in an argument about an automobile backing into a tree by the driveway."

"Sam Patterson and his wife!"

"Mort," she looked up pleadingly. "Will you take me for a drive in the country? Away from the city — where I can rest? Maybe we can figure out some way for me to get to the Foundation. You said you'd help."

She intercepted his mental picture. It showed him with her, riding in an open automobile. Peaceful highway. Moonlight. His arm around her shoulder. But he was regarding the possible development only modestly, unassumingly. There was nothing in his I-stream to cause alarm. She knew that he would not put his arm around her if she didn't want him to.

Then he turned abruptly to thoughts of her haggard appearance and of the food that he might offer her from the refrigerator.

It was a solacing ride and the air was clean and silent, undesecrated by the uninhibited profanity of a thousand minds. And the moon *was* bright and encouraging. There were only scattered farmhouses set far back off the road and no I-streams of any consequences were coming from them. It took only little effort to blank out Mort's unpretentious reflections.

"Are you — listening in now?" he asked suddenly.

"No. I avoid it whenever I can. It — it doesn't seem proper."

"How long have you been this way?"

"Ever since I can remember."

"And yet it was only today that you found you couldn't bear it?"

"Yesterday and today. But this is the first time I've ever been among — people . . . really among people. Oh, there were times before this — visits to the village, daily contact with a private teacher. But thoughts in a

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small town are — different. And there aren't as many of them. At least, I could stand them once in a while — whenever I had to go in to town."

"You said your father was telepathic too?"

She nodded. "That was why we lived alone — after mother left him and after he found out I was the same way."

"Why did your mother leave?"

"In a way, dad wanted her to go, after he realized how hopeless it was. He saw the distrust that was in her mind; saw he would never be able to explain why he occasionally acted in compliance with her wishes, even before she expressed them. He knew, through his total knowledge of her character, that he would never be able to soothe her suspicions. Yet he also knew that if he disclosed his true nature she would be convinced it was impossible to live with him. Besides, he was certain that telling her would mean his eventual exposure."

"Why didn't he tell her before he married her?"

"He wanted to try to live a normal life."

He slowed the automobile until it was barely moving. "Didn't she love him?"

"I suppose she did — at first. But there's no way of using hindsight to judge what her real feelings were, not with an — inhuman factor involved."

"But maybe if she had *really* loved him . . . ?"

Lois turned toward him, distressed. "What's the difference between *loving* a person and *really loving* him? How can you know when there's enough love to compensate for the incompatibility in living with someone who has a supernatural talent? That's why dad said I would have to live alone; never get married; never have children."

He stopped the car and looked at her. On his face there was a silent refusal to accept the despair that she was trying to convey.

"I suppose," she went on, "that eventually dad could have adjusted and learned to live with her despite the — inhuman factor. But then, when I came along and when he saw, by looking into my mind even before I could talk, that I was going to have the same ability . . . well, I guess he just realized I wouldn't be able to hide what had taken all his ingenuity to hide."

"He saw that in your childish inability to understand you would betray the fact that you and he could receive thoughts?" Mort guessed.

Lois nodded. "After that, he helped along the rift between them. She left before I was three."

She looked down into her hands and sighed helplessly.

"He was determined for you and him to live alone?"

"He said we could never let people know about our difference because

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we'd be nothing but — freaks. And there would always be someone who would find a way to *use* us — even against our will. He said there was no cure."

"And he died and you left?"

"He died and I *had* to leave. I couldn't stay out there alone. I'm only twenty. I want to live the rest of my life normally. If I can't, I don't want to live it at all. . . . Don't you understand, Mort? I've got to find out whether dad was wrong; whether there *is* some way of curing me!"

He looked sympathetically at her. "And you picked the Brinkwell Foundation for the answer?"

She nodded. "Oh, there are other institutions that study ESP. But Brinkwell was the closest."

"It's Army-subsidized, you know. Their only interest in ESP is its possible military application."

"But they've got to help!"

"Have you asked them?"

She sighed. "In letters, yes."

"The results?"

"No answers. They probably thought like you." She smiled weakly. "That I'm a psycho case. They ignored the letters. But I came anyway. If I can only get there, I can prove my ability. I showed you, didn't I?"

"We'll get you there." He grasped her hand reassuringly. "I'll keep you away from the city until the middle of the morning. I'll call and tell them I have someone who shows special ESP talent. Then they'll have everything ready for when we make our break through the city."

"I —" She looked up into his face, arranging her now-combed hair. "I don't know what I would have done —"

"When they submit you to the tests, however, I would suggest that you don't try to tell them what your trouble is when you first go in. That'll put them on the skeptical defensive right away. Let them find out. Then they'll be anxious for you to tell them whatever you can."

He started the car up and drove off slowly.

"Listening in now?" he asked hesitatingly after a while.

"I shouldn't be?"

"No. That is — I mean —" He sighed. "I keep forgetting that I can't hide anything from you. . . . Look, Lois, you're a beautiful girl. I don't guess I'd be normal if I didn't sense a developing attraction."

He loosened his tie. "This is an awkward situation. What I'm trying to say is — well, you said those thoughts from the crowd were awful. But, some of them — those that aren't purposefully lustful — are more or less instinctive and —"

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"I understand, Mort." She placed her hand reassuringly on his arm.

"I mean I don't want you to think . . . I don't want to be misunderstood, is what I'm trying to say," he finished abruptly.

She smiled warmly. If there were only some way she could reassure him without herself blurting awkwardly. It would seem assuming to say, I've received enough thoughts to know the sincere ones from the imposing, selfish ones.

Restrained fatigue seemed to flow up around her like an ocean swell. She put her head on his shoulder — because she felt that she would feel safe, secure if she did — while he drove on through the rural calm. Soon she was asleep.

The lights in the office were dim and the atmosphere was one of depressing discomfort. Lois closed her eyes in frustration.

"But, doctor," she began protestingly, "don't you see —?"

"Now see here, Miss Farley." The man turned on her indignantly. "There is a prescribed procedure which we must follow in establishing an initial ESP rating. You must cooperate."

The tests had been monotonous, fatiguing. Almost as harassing as her frantic drive through the city with Mort. She wished he were here now instead of waiting in his office in the other wing. But they had insisted on examining her alone.

"If you'd only let me explain!" she began again.

Seated across the desk from her, the doctor looked up sharply. "There will be an interview to record any personal extrasensory experiences which you may wish to relate — later. But now we must go on with the tests."

She should have insisted on speaking with them first, she realized as the assaulting I-streams of the doctor and the three military men in the room mounted in intensity.

The doctor cleared his throat. "We will continue with the card test. You will concentrate and call the cards as I turn them over and look at them."

(. . . *impertinent girl* . . .) It was the doctor's indignant thought that came as he picked up the top card on the face-down deck.

(. . . *could have my lieutenant colonel's insignia in a week if* . . . *would welcome overseas duty* . . . *damned toothache* . . .) These, she realized, were intruding impressions from the Army officers — thoughts that permeated and seemed to become a part of the I-stream of the civilian who sat opposite her.

(. . . *nothing exceptional in this case so far* . . . *wonder if I should have that tooth extracted?* . . . *MAYBE SHE'LL GUESS THIS ONE* . . .) The doctor looked at the card.

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She tried to snatch the identity of the printed symbol from his mind. But (. . . *it's hurting more now . . . duty in the Hawaiian Islands should . . . see the dentist right after . . .*) the other insolent thoughts were dominant.

"Crescent," she guessed suddenly.

"Wrong again," sighed the doctor.

"Really," the major rose impatiently. "We have seen nothing here to indicate any special ability."

Impulsively she rose too, tense with resentment. "I didn't come here to read symbols. I didn't say I could do anything like that. I receive words — thoughts — bits of what other people are thinking."

The men looked at one another cautiously.

"Now, now, Miss Farley," said the major indulgently, "do you propose to have us believe that you actually *read minds?*"

She faced him angrily. But she restrained the words she would have used and turned her attention to their thought fragments, trying to repeat them as rapidly as they came to her.

". . . girl's mentally unbalanced," she called out in a fleeting voice. ". . . telepathic reception! Impossible! . . . psychotic tendencies . . . no doubt now trying to create the impression she's reading minds . . . I'll call a nurse . . ."

She relaxed, turned her concentration from the thought streams. "Now do you believe me?"

The doctor was looking at her coldly. "That outburst, Miss Farley, was no doubt intended to convince us you were receiving thoughts from us?"

"Didn't it?" she asked apprehensively.

The colonel laughed. "You merely called out a group of logical phrases — phrases which we would *naturally* be thinking under the circumstances."

The major and the captain nodded in agreement.

She started. They were right! If she wanted to convince them, she would have to demonstrate at a time when they were off guard; when her attempted performance would not cause them to return to the stereotype thinking which they could charge was "logical and expected under the circumstances."

Numbly, she sat.

"We will prepare for another test," said the doctor.

Lois, pretending indeterminateness in her actions, picked up the pencil and began scribbling on the pad before her. Now their thoughts were returning to normal. Now the major was thinking about becoming a lieutenant colonel; the captain, about overseas duty. She jotted down the thoughts as fast as she could.

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(. . . *Harry did . . . painless job on that last tooth . . . last assignment, Cuba, was . . .*) She had almost reached the end of the page. (. . . . *MISS FARLEY — NAME'S FAMILIAR . . . . be another week before Ann . . . . FARLEY — FARLEY — FARLEY . . . new skates for the kid . . . OF COURSE! THAT CRACKPOT GIRL WHO WROTE THE LETTERS! . . .*)

She stopped writing and looked up at the doctor. "I'm the girl who wrote the letters about me and my father," she said, relieved.

(. . . *IS THE ONE! . . . that crazy girl! . . . prize dopes for being roped in on . . .*)

She stood excitedly in the center of the room. "The letters were true! Everything I wrote about was true! The thoughts in my head! I can't stop them!"

(. . . *ha! She can't stop the voices in her head . . . case for the psychiatrist . . . ought to kick her out . . .*) There was only indignation — not even pity — in the impressions.

"But you've got to believe me!" She glanced frantically around the room. Her eyes fell on the pad with her writing on it. She snatched it up; handed it to the doctor.

He wrenched it from her and hurled it angrily into the waste basket; reached for the telephone.

(. . . *get rid of her in a hurry . . . POLICE MEDICAL CONSULTANT . . . completely mad . . .*)

Suddenly she received someone's idea-picture of a state mental institution. She shook with fright. If it was excruciating for her to absorb the thoughts of a sane population, how could she possibly endure the I-streams of the mentally deranged?

The consciousnesses of the four men assailed her with blasts of resentment and accusation. Frantic and unable to arrange her own thoughts, she whirled around and lurched from the room before they could stop her; ran down the long corridor and out into the crowded street.

Violent mental impressions closed in on her like an instantly coalescing fog. She reeled under their impact; opened her mouth to cry out in anguish.

"Hi, Harry," she said. "Got time for a quick beer?"

She collided with someone in the sidewalk throng and the physical sensation of sudden impact restored her awareness of self momentarily.

"Church!" she muttered, regaining her balance. "Got to get . . ." Her voice dropped to a lower, coarser range, "Why in hell don't you look where . . . hold mommy's hand tightly, darling . . . yeah, that's what the meter says . . ."

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There was another collision and she fell to the sidewalk roughly; tripped over the hem of her coat as someone tried to help her up.

Dazed and tortured under the incessant barrage of thoughts and picture-images that were racing into her mind in a mad vortex, she looked around her. The Foundation was a block behind.

Only three more blocks to go!

The tall spire of the church dominated the skyline like a beckoning finger. But the image blurred and, although she was conscious of jogging numbly forward, eyes that were not her own but somehow sent their impressions to her brain focused on a pair of patent leather pumps in a show window.

(. . . *Molloy's got them cheaper* . . .)

"Church! Church!" Her individual consciousness broke through for an ephemeral second.

Then there was a windshield in front of her. Also in her field of vision were two wrinkled hands that created the illusion of being her own while they gripped a steering wheel. She wrenched the wheel violently.

(. . . *goddam old woman oughta stay on the sidewalk where* . . .)

The windshield was gone. A pipe bowl dominated the area of vision. Again, hands which weren't her own but which she seemed to control brought up a match and cupped its flame over the crimp-cut tobacco in a pipe bowl. Smoke swirled into her throat and came out through her mouth and nose. She coughed spasmodically.

(. . . *thanks for the match, skipper* . . .)

Brakes screeched. Stiff metal rammed against her hip. Once more she was conscious of falling. Someone helped her up in front of the suddenly halted automobile.

Streams of vilification flowed into her mind. Numbly, she glanced at the irate, scared driver. A crowd started to gather. But she forced them aside and raced onto the other sidewalk.

"CHURCH!" she screamed.

Kirk Douglas placed his arms around Lana Turner's waist and drew her close; kissed her. The words THE END flashed across Lois' mind and there was the taste of salty popcorn in her mouth.

Now she put a cold metal object between her lips and blew hard; raised one arm and waved the other; watched a stream of cars come to a halt and another stream, perpendicular to the first, roll into motion and pass her on either side.

"Come on!" she shouted. "Speed it up! Speed it up!"

Finally she received the vague physical impression of tired, numb legs carrying her in a frantic dash up marble steps. The flamboyant archway of

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the main church entrance swam into focus. The I-streams faded; the captured mental pictures began washing away like sand castles on a wave-swept beach.

Exhausted and bewildered, she grasped a font to steady herself.

Then she walked falteringly up the aisle and knelt in a pew, lowering her forehead onto the back of the pew ahead of her. Fatigue was an overpowering compulsion that dulled her physical senses.

(. . . *Please, God, forgive . . . had to kill him . . . told him about the baby and . . .*)

Lois snapped erect. The blonde girl in the black dress that was almost a duplicate of her own was three rows in front of her. Lois searched for and found the shield-like determination to shut out the other's thoughts. Then she sidled along the pew until she was next to the side aisle — deep in the shadows that hung close to the right wall.

An hour passed. She tried to count the hours remaining before the streets would be sufficiently deserted to allow her to return to the train station. She sobbed. But she didn't want to return home! She didn't want to live alone — an outcast until her sequestered death!

Abruptly she realized with a sense of calm that she would never consent to such isolation. She would not make the mistake her father had — living until natural death ended his anguish. Nor would she marry and have a child and learn that the child was like her and run with it to total obscurity.

Now she was thinking of Mort — his tenderness and understanding, the love which he couldn't hide. Perhaps she should see him first and thank him — at least tell him why she had raced off and left him waiting. . . . But, no. It was better this way. Anyway, they'd tell him how they were convinced she was crazy and how she had fled. And he'd know that she had to do what she was going to do. It would hurt him. But he'd understand.

It must have been the lunch hour. For persons were drifting into the church — the devout for noon-time prayers, she surmised.

(. . . *blonde hair . . . dark dress . . . must be her . . .*)

A man strode hurriedly up the center aisle, stopped at the entrance to the pew where the praying blonde knelt.

It was Mort!

His lips moved rapidly in a whisper as he turned into the pew. There was fright on the girl's face as she looked at him.

Lois was too far away to hear the whisper, but the word came to her telepathically (*Lois!*).

Then he saw it wasn't she and his face flashed disappointment as he backed out of the pew. But, turning in the right direction, he recognized her even as she tried to melt farther into the shadows.

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(. . . *knew I'd find her here* . . .) His I-stream welled as he approached. (. . . *must be half-crazy* . . .)

In the pew, he forced his way past a stout woman who stared up resentfully at him. Then he was kneeling next to Lois, grasping her arm tenderly, but roughly — in desperation.

"They're looking for you!" he exclaimed. (. . . *found the pad in the waste basket* . . .) his thoughts raced ahead of his words.

"Oh, Mort!" she gasped. "Then they believe? They'll help me?"

An elderly man, several rows ahead, turned and stared caustically at them.

"They'll help?" Lois lowered her voice to a whisper.

(. . . *help? — ha? — they'll* . . .) There was tragic distress in his eyes. "Lois, darling. They're hunting all over! They realized what you really represent!"

A protesting "sh-h-h" sounded in the back of them.

Lois caught a mental picture of a large, high-ceilinged room with scores of men seated around curving tables, all confronted by microphones.

"Mort!" she whispered fearfully. "What is it?"

"Can't you imagine," he explained in a toned-down voice, "the diplomatic weapon you'd be as an 'aide' to the delegation to the United Nations? We'd know immediately to what extent another power is bluffing; what their real military potential is!"

She gasped. There'd be nothing but conferences and talks and meetings! And she would be forced to intercept all the international hate and deception that would hang like an angry swarm over the Assembly room!

"But I — I couldn't stand it!" she exclaimed aloud. "I — it'd kill me!"

The man ahead turned and regarded them severely. "Please!" he gruffed.

"You've got to escape before they find you!" Mort pleaded, his lips close to her ear. (. . . *injections regularly* . . . *drugs to force rest between sessions* . . .) "You told them about your father too?"

She nodded, remembering the letters she had written.

(. . . *will assume it's a newly ingrained, permanent hereditary trait* . . .) "They'll want more like you! They'll make you have children for diplomatic and military use!"

In the quiet church his frantic words were an outburst. A score of heads turned in their direction. A priest walked from the sacristy onto the altar and stared puzzedly out at the worshipers. The woman at the other end of their pew moved to the front of the church.

(. . . *breed her* . . . *like a prize animal at a county fair* . . .) Lois was aware only of Mort's distraught thoughts.

She started to cry, quietly, with a restraint that was possible only by

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virtue of the grim, growing conviction that she did not want to live any longer.

"It's just like dad said," she sobbed, almost below her breath. "They'd only find a way to use us selfishly!"

He put an arm around her shoulder comfortingly. (. . . *got to think of something . . . some place to hide her . . .*)

(. . . *kill myself . . . that's what I'll do . . . no other way . . .*) Was it her own thought, springing up as though of alien origin, to convince her that the only real sanctuary was death?

"It's no use, Mort." She shook her head morosely and her voice was barely audible. "They'll never stop hunting. They'll *have* to search forever — even if it's only for fear that an enemy power will find me first."

(. . . *must be some way . . . island? . . . forest? . . .*) His thoughts were desperate. (. . . *can't lose her . . . ranch! . . . but no . . . they'd only connect me with her . . . find her through me . . .*)

"It's no use, darling," she said, not looking into his eyes. "There's only one way."

He looked apprehensively at her.

"I'm going to kill myself."

He drove a fist into his palm in despair.

The explosive noise sent heads turning toward them again and elicited a chorus of "sh-h-hs."

(. . . *love her . . . but that's too selfish a reason to make her see . . . got to find . . .*)

His eyes suddenly bored sternly into hers. "You have —" he started in a normal voice; winced as he glanced around guiltily, and continued in a whisper, "You have no right to take your life. More persons are concerned than just you and me!"

She looked askance.

"You are a *whole race!*" Robbed of emphatic speech, he stressed the words by gripping her arm rudely. "The accident that made you — the mutation suffered by your father, if that's what it was — may not occur again in the next million years. You've got to preserve it! You've got to give the new race a chance!"

She laughed bitterly but silently. "If it was a mutation, then it's no good, Mort. Don't you see, it's a lethal mutation! One that makes existence in a normal world impossible — one that *precludes* survival!"

She rose from her knees and sat in the pew. He sat beside her and caught her shoulders to turn her toward him. "It might seem that way now, darling. But we'll never know unless we find out whether we can live with it. Your father did — until he died a natural death."

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"But he lived an isolated life."

"Maybe that's the answer! Isolation until there are sufficient numbers . . ."

Lois turned away dourly. "By partial isolation, a moderate-sized colony might be formed three or four hundred years from now. But don't you see what would happen as soon as our nature became known? Don't you see how the elements of greed and profit would descend upon us — kill us off either violently or through forced servitude?"

"Oh, darling!" he groped desperately. "How can I make you understand that the race is at a dead end? It's devouring itself in its own selfishness and deceit — its own vicious lust!"

"But, Mort —"

Unaware of it, their voices had welled gradually in volume until once more impatient eyes were ringing them in from all directions. The man ahead rose, left the pew, stood in the aisle for a second glowering at them, then walked heavily toward the back of the church.

Irritated, Mort restrained his voice again. "The motivations that drive humanity *now* are the lethal ones! Not the ones you represent! Two thousand years from now, if you survive, things may be different. There'll be a thoroughly unselfish race — one completely without deceit, enmity for the other person. With each mind open to every other mind, there'll be no room for anything but good! There'll be no hiding place for evil intent!

"And the tortures you feel now — they're *not* a necessary price that has to be paid for the ability. You suffer during thought reception because you've had no chance to adapt yourself to it on a full scale. You've been isolated since birth. Your coming to the city was like a person who's been deaf from birth suddenly gaining his hearing in a massive concert hall where a thousand bands are playing 'The Anvil Chorus'! If you'd been born there, you would be accustomed to the conglomerate thought-streams!"

"But —"

"You are the second individual of a new race! You must protect the millions of descendants who will come after you. You are the only one who can supply the scores of generations that will be needed for them to learn to live with the non-telepathic race!"

Lois looked up suddenly and started. A tall, severe priest was standing in the aisle at the end of their pew. His arms were folded stiffly. Half the people in the church were surveying the personal scene eagerly — almost vengefully, Lois imagined — to witness the consequences of their impudence.

(. . . *inconsiderate violation* . . . *house of God* . . .) "I'm sure," said the priest curtly, "there is nothing so important that it can't wait until you are outside for discussion!"

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He turned and went back toward the front of the church. (. . . *if they keep it up . . . have to ask them to leave . . .*)

Hardly conscious of the interruption, she turned to Mort. "It's no use. I can't take the chance! You don't know the torture of being dispossessed of your body while the thoughts of a hundred strangers take control of your lips, your hands, your mind!"

Defeat spread out from his mind like a pall. She could feel its depressing effect.

(. . . *kill myself — now . . .*) The phrase of forceful determination sprang up in her mind. She rose.

She could feel the exasperation flowing from him as he opened his mouth to talk. But he shut it immediately, glancing in frustration at the others around them.

Sit down! His thought emanation was an angry shout.

Unable to resist the authority that the unspoken order conveyed, she sat, puzzled.

(. . . *got to kill myself . . . God forgive . . . had to shoot . . .*)

I'm not going to try to reason with you any longer, Lois. You're too distressed to think clearly enough for yourself; for me; for the millions of future persons like you.

"Mort!" she gasped. "I'm receiving your complete I-stream! Not just snatches! It's just as though dad and I were talking with our thoughts! Are you a — a . . .?"

No, Lois. I'm not a telepath. I just realized that no normal person had ever directed *thoughts toward you before. And God knows I had to find some way of shouting loud enough to convince you!*

His thought impressions were ringing clearly in her brain — like vibrant chimes. But there was no pain attending their reception! His unspoken words were stronger than any group-impressions she had ever intercepted before; stronger even than the composite I-streams she had received on the street. Yet the effect was not overwhelming but gently soothing.

There was a commotion in the rear of the church. But she hardly heard it as she marveled over the discovery that his thoughts could be dominant — almost hypnotic — but painless at the same time.

He glanced at the entrance.

"Lois!" he whispered in alarm. "Did you tell them about the church? Did you tell them at the Foundation that you hid here yesterday?"

She nodded, turning to look at the entrance. Two policemen were standing in the doorway. A priest, confronting them, was shaking his head in protest.

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The gasp that came from deep within the shadows of the nearby right wing was audible. (. . . *no time left for prayer! . . . found me . . . God, forgive me for what I have to do . . .*)

The blonde in the black dress, staring in terror at the policemen, eased out of her pew, passing near Lois and Mort, and found the broad stairway leading to the upper reaches of the imposing building.

But one of the policemen saw her as she climbed through a patch of multi-colored sunlight coming from a stained glass window on the second level. He pointed. But the priest shook his head again.

(. . . *may be dangerous . . .*) Lois intercepted a fragment of the thought behind the words of the officer, too far away to be heard. (. . . *got away from the Foundation this morning . . . if you insist on avoiding an arrest in the church . . .*)

Then they had assumed the distraught blonde was the fugitive telepath! Lois surmised as much when she realized that the other girl did answer her description in a general sort of way except for the absence of the coat.

Mort seized her hand and drew her unobtrusively out of the pew, into the aisle near the wall. Their flight concealed behind columns, he headed for the side exit.

"We'll get out of the city," he said eagerly. "My ranch. It's far away from everything and —"

"They'll know, Mort! When they find you're missing, that'll be the first place they'll look!"

But he ignored her protest with a brusque, "We have to take the chance." Then they were outside in the chasm-like alleyway between the church and the adjacent building. The impressive, rough-stone walls of the former stretched 100 feet up to the parapet wall on their right; the unbroken, brick wall of the latter, 50 feet up on their left.

The I-streams from the crowds on the street began assailing her and she brought her hands up nervously to her face as they turned toward the alley exit.

But he stopped abruptly. (. . . *gate . . . locked! . . .*)

She looked ahead. A solid metal gate barred the only exit to the street. Behind them, the alley ended against the imprisoning wall of a third building.

A terrified scream erupted in the dismal gorge.

Lois intercepted mental impressions of terrific fear, despair, and looked up in time to see a form hurtling down from an open window on the fourth level of the church.

She threw her hands over eyes as Mort grasped her shoulders and pulled her protectively against him.

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The intruding sensations of desperation, terror, ended abruptly as the harsh sound of the soft body striking the concrete surface reached her ears.

(. . . *girl in the church* . . .) It was Mort's horrified I-stream.

"Oh, Mort!" she clutched his arm frantically. "She was *so much* like me! So much in trouble that she couldn't bear it either!"

"So much like you!" he repeated, inspired. "That's it, Lois! Take off your coat — quick!"

She looked at him in bewilderment, trying not to let her eyes fall on the crushed body of the girl.

"Your coat!" he insisted as she hesitated. (. . . *face mangled . . . torn beyond recognition against the stones of the wall . . .*)

Still confused, she took off the coat and handed it to him. He hurled it to the ground next to the girl's body.

"You've got identification somewhere?" he asked.

"My purse . . . There's a wallet; some money; papers. Yes, there's an identification card too."

He snatched Lois' purse; substituted it for the girl's, which had fallen beside her body. Then he took Lois' hand and raced with her behind one of the decorative pilasters spaced along the side of the church.

He gave her the handbag. "When we get to the ranch I'll destroy it."

"The ranch?"

"Of course." He smiled. "You're dead now. Don't you understand, darling? They won't have any reason to keep on hunting for a dead telepath. I'll leave you at the ranch and come back here; work for a few months more so they won't be suspicious. Then I'll join you and —"

A key grated in the lock of the metal gate. They shrank farther behind the pilaster as police, followed by scores of curious persons, surged into the alleyway, encircled the girl's body.

Their thought streams began assailing Lois as they pressed closer to her hiding place.

(. . . *suicide . . . from the church window, too . . . pretty legs . . . that window up there . . . messy face . . .*)

Don't think, Lois! If their thoughts are reaching you, just refuse to hear them. Listen to mine. Concentrate on what I'm thinking, darling. It's peaceful out at the ranch. Nobody within miles. It's deserted now. But we'll stock up and paint the barn and redecorate the house and . . .

His powerful but comforting thoughts were a steady intonation that stood like a shield between her and the neurotic I-streams of the others. She smiled up at him and there was confidence on her face.

He took her hand and they stepped from behind the pilaster to join the crowd that was leaving the alley for the street.

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Recommended Reading

by THE EDITORS

NEXT MONTH we'll devote this column to our usual Best-of-the-Past-Year list; and in the four and a half years since this magazine was founded (which roughly coincides with the recognition of science fiction by regular trade publishers), we haven't had such a plethora of first-rate books to choose from. In particular, 1953 was an astonishingly strong year in full-length science fiction novels; earlier in the year there were extraordinary novels by Alfred Bester, Arthur C. Clarke, C. M. Kornbluth (both solo and in collaboration with Frederik Pohl) and Ward Moore, any one of which could have been the single, strikingly outstanding Best Novel of a previous year — and now comes Theodore Sturgeon's MORE THAN HUMAN (Farrar, Straus & Young, hard cover, $2; Ballantine, paper, 35¢), which ranks at least beside and possibly above those just mentioned.

This is the book which was originally announced for publication as THE FABULOUS IDIOT, a long novel of which the celebrated *Galaxy* novella BABY IS THREE forms the middle section. It may seem absurd to speak of the coming of age of an old-line master responsible for so many pure classics of science-fantasy as Sturgeon; but the truth is that this new novel represents such an advance over the previous highs of Sturgeon's work that it seems to mark the first complete fulfilment of his unique talents.

As all science fiction readers know, Sturgeon has been much obsessed for years by the concept of symbiosis — the idea that among sensitive human beings one and one can add up, not to two or even three, but to a greater One, of a different order of magnitude. Here he has finally achieved the full and definitive statement of this theme, in the story of a half dozen people, curiously ranging from idiocy to genius, who became together one unit of a new race: Homo Gestalt. And on this theme Sturgeon has constructed a novel as varied as the members of this strange unit. In its crystal-clear prose, its intense human warmth and its depth of psychological probing, it is a first-rate "straight" novel; its ingenious use of telepathy, psychokinesis and other "psi" powers make it admirable science-fantasy; and the adroit plotting and ceaseless surge of action qualify it as a distinguished suspense story. Symbiotically, these factors add up to more than their sum — add up, indeed, to one of the most impressive proofs yet of the possibility of science fiction as a part of mainstream literature.

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You'll find most of these same Sturgeonesque qualities (including many statements of the symbiosis theme) in his second collection of short stories, E PLURIBUS UNICORN (Abelard, $2.75), but this time without any cumulative effect. The book is a hodgepodge of hitherto unreprinted Sturgeon (much of it non-fantasy), which adds up only to evidence of a distinctive talent shooting off in random directions. The unicorn of the title is, of course, the beautiful *The Silken Swift* (F&SF, November, 1953) and there are a number of other Grade A Sturgeon stories . . . along with a good many one can see no particular reason for collecting. It's still a book belonging in any fantasy library; but more selective editing could have produced a far better volume.

Yet another 1953 novel which would have shone like a nova in a lesser year is Fritz Leiber's THE GREEN MILLENNIUM (Abelard, $2.75). Apparently not published in any magazine, this is a full-scale study of that terrible degenerate future of sadism and cut-throat enterprise so bitterly and brilliantly described in some of Leiber's best short stories. A new and different kind of interplanetary invader, an elaborate complex of plots and counterplots, Heinleinesque exposition of a future technology and culture, and plentiful injections of sex, tension and sheer pursuit-excitement put this up beside Bester and Kornbluth in the suspense-cum-sociology division of future fiction.

Of course 1953's novels have not been unfailingly on this high level. Lewis Padgett's WELL OF THE WORLDS (Galaxy, 35¢) is an alternate-universe adventure story which winds up with a splendidly visualized, C. L. Moore-ish climax, but takes a slow and conventional road to reach it. A. E. van Vogt's THE UNIVERSE MAKER (Ace, 35¢) sounds like the work of an imitative neophyte who had read too much van Vogt and absorbed the weaknesses without the strength. And L. Sprague de Camp's THE TRITONIAN RING (Twayne, $2.95) is one of those endless tales of a prehistoric (or more precisely, non-historic) kingdom of swordplay and bloodshed, which seem to us to bear little relation to science fiction or fantasy. Those readers — and they are apparently numerous — who dote on this sort of thing will also revel, of course, in Robert E. Howard's THE COMING OF CONAN (Gnome, $3), which includes, among other items, two of the recently discovered Howard fragments reconstructed by de Camp.

In addition to this Howard volume and the Sturgeon collection, there have been three recent books of shorter pieces, all of more interest to the historian and collector than to the general reader. Robert A. Heinlein's ASSIGNMENT IN ETERNITY (Fantasy Press, $3) contains two lightweight and entertaining novelets and two pretty weak short novels — all interesting as Heinlein-never-before-reprinted, but hardly a book with which we could

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defend our thesis that this is the foremost living writer of true science fiction. John W. Campbell, Jr.'s THE BLACK STAR PASSES (Fantasy Press, $3) is a hopelessly outdated set of novelets from *Amazing* in 1930, written well before the author could vote, of concern only to those who wish to observe the awkward larval stage of a major figure in science fiction — though you should read Mr. Campbell's objective and attractive introduction. Zealia B. Bishop's THE CURSE OF YIG (Arkham House, $3) contains three negligible stories from *Weird Tales*, plus two first-rate biographical profiles: one plausibly presenting H. P. Lovecraft in a somewhat less favorable light than that in which he is shown by his idolators, and one which comes close to doing justice to the fabulous career of August Derleth.

In the largely drab field of science fiction for younger readers, John Keir Cross's THE STOLEN SPHERE (Dutton, $2.75) is pure and absolute delight — for adults just as much as for the audience at which it's aimed. Not much science, to be sure, but a wondrous melodrama with a vivid show business background, in which a team of trapeze artists travel all over Europe alternately pursuing and being pursued by the sinister illusionist Rubberface, as gratifyingly villainous a villain as we've met in years. It's that rare combination, found, for instance, in R. L. Stevenson and Michael Innes, of high literacy and forthright blood-and-thunder, and we can't wait for the promised sequel. Milton Lesser's THE STAR SEEKERS (Winston, $2) is a juvenile restatement of the theme of Heinlein's *Universe* — the lost spaceship-civilization which has come to think that the ship is all the world there is. Details of logic, extrapolation and mathematics are often slipshod; but it's a lively, imaginative, well-told adventure story for the young.

Unfortunately, little good can be said about Lesser's anthology, LOOKING FORWARD (Beechhurst), a book distinguished only by its incredibly high price of $4.95. In his introduction, this editor announces that "science fiction has come of age" . . . whatever that may mean. Prime support for this contention is drawn from recent television and motion picture activities! We need not discuss the anthology's contents here; they are either run-of-the-mill or easily available in better collections. Hereward Carrington's amorphous collection of fantasy, THE WEEK-END BOOK OF GHOST STORIES (Washburn, $3.50), arrays such multi-told classics as *The Monkey's Paw* with a few unknown stories that are wretchedly inadequate in idea and execution. It's not even a bargain for the beginning collector.

As far as the present inhabitants of Terra are concerned, probably the most important book ever to be mentioned in this column is Major Donald E. Keyhoe's FLYING SAUCERS FROM OUTER SPACE (Holt, $3). Major Keyhoe's long struggle for permission to make public the records of the United States Air Force's data on Unidentified Flying Objects — certainly a more

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precise, less absurd term than 'saucers' — resulted in temporary victory. With the permission of officers no longer in uniform he has published a detailed (and disturbing) record of observations by pilots, by ground observers . . . *and by radar.* It should be stressed that the Air Force has never discontinued its formal project of recording and attempting to evaluate all sightings of UFO's. Happily or unhappily, as the case may be, the Air Force has split into two factions over the advisability of making its authenticated data public. The advocates of publicity opened the files of the Air Technical Intelligence Center to Major Keyhoe; now, most of these have left the service and the proponents of secrecy are, for the moment, in command. While it is reassuring to know that our air arm is neither sensationalizing these extra-terrestrial visitors as did Messrs. Scully and Adamski, nor explaining them away with the ludicrous disregard of fact of a Menzel or Liddell, these reviewers can't help feeling that this nation is adult enough to be told the exact state of things as they are. But Major Keyhoe's book more than counteracts this dubious policy of silence. It is a sober, incontrovertible argument that we are now being observed (and have been for some years) by some form of highly intelligent alien life and that one day soon, we'll all have to decide what's best to do about it. CONQUEST OF THE MOON (Viking, $4.50), edited by Cornelius Ryan, is a unified and vastly expanded version of the *Collier's* symposium by Wernher von Braun, Fred L. Whipple and Willy Ley. And of course, the book has wondrous illustrations by Chesley Bonestell, Fred Freeman and Rolf Klep. The unification makes it impossible to determine who wrote what; further, the book is slightly flawed by a certain "this is how it's going to be" dogmatism and by a deliberate failure to mention the implications of war and politics. But by and large, it is an excellent study, especially in its detailed explanation of just what we will do on the moon once we land there, and there's almost a complete roster of research projects that must, and will be launched on Luna. There is plausible data on time schedules and over-all costs. Assuming that all goes well with this by no means best-of-all-possible worlds, we shall very soon visit and explore our satellite and the whole operation will be pretty much as these men prophesy. The third discussion of space travel, YOUR TRIP INTO SPACE, by Lynn Poole (Whittlesey, $2.75), is a juvenile although the jacket doesn't mention that fact. Well, your editors have three sons between them; for once censorship will be exercised and none of the three will be exposed to this dull hodgepodge of confusion and downright inaccuracy.

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In which it is revealed that the Powers of Hell and of Heaven, much though they may otherwise differ, agree in regarding the weight of the evidence as the immutable foundation of justice.

The Appraiser

by DORIS P. BUCK

"ALL I ASK in return for my soul," said Mr. Randolph modestly, "is one world-famous ballerina. I don't demand a long succession of varied mistresses. Also I want to be a celebrated actor. Of course I must live in a setting worthy of —"

He coughed at this point, not from embarrassment, but because the strong sulphur fumes irritated his throat.

The devil in charge looked properly sympathetic. "We're sorry fumes are so strong in the antechamber," he said (his own voice was a little rough), "but there's nothing we can do about it. You'd think with all the technological improvements, most of which were dreamed up here originally, that we'd have made some progress in fume control. But no." He smiled a pleasant devil-to-devil grin that made Mr. Randolph instantly at home.

Mr. Randolph even felt so much at ease that he wondered if he might not have asked for rather more — perhaps to be the greatest Hamlet of recorded time. After all, with his youth, his looks, and his fine Virginia breeding, mistresses had not — He ran his hand over the soft black hair that was like a cloud above his long face, and thought perhaps he could have attended to the women on his own. Maybe he should have put more stress on his career, which seemed at the moment to be limited to summer engagements in Paul Green's symphonic drama, *The Common Glory*, at Williamsburg.

The young man pulled himself up short. No, he'd resolved not to price himself out of the market. He'd stick to his original proposition. He pressed his hand against his left side (from which a devil with sterile instruments had deftly extracted his soul only a few moments before). His side felt lighter, but probably that was imagination.

"Perhaps you'd like to look around the Museum while you wait for our appraiser's report," the devil said. He led Mr. Randolph to a room opening

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off the antechamber. If it had not been for the red glare, Mr. Randolph could have imagined himself in Washington, entering one of those educational displays that explain about our forest resources or the distribution of edible fish.

The Museum was filled with cases, each of which contained the soul of someone every school child should know. Complete explanations of the souls' values were posted conveniently near.

"We feel this is unusually informative," said the devil, with excusable pride, as he led Mr. Randolph to the smoldering, but slightly flawed, ruby that was the soul of Julius Caesar. "He traded it in for supreme generalship and literary style of the first order. It's not usual for the same man to want both, but we were able to oblige him, in spite of an obvious flaw which lessened his value. All we asked in return was that his *Commentaries* should be used to teach elementary Latin, that he should be assassinated at the height of his career (we really did him a favor there) and that" — the devil chuckled — "that he should become prematurely bald. We had serious trouble there, but finally made him see things our way. Look around for yourself now. You'll see how generous our terms have always been."

Mr. Randolph, uneasy in spite of his jaunty air, looked in Case #2. It contained a white butterfly, all that was left of Madame Du Barry. The Devil must have fancied it; though the French milliner only asked for a king to bring morning chocolate to her bedside, she got a good deal more, including an exquisite gold-and-white library with hardly any books.

Mr. Randolph — remembering what a charmer Jeanne Bécu had been — felt depressed. Bleak suspicions chilled him. Though he held his head high and smiled as if all life were infectious fun, he began to wonder why the appraiser was taking so long. Perhaps this was a regular procedure in Hell, a device for tiring you, making you take any terms, no matter how empty. He thought maybe he was being watched. On the off chance, he wolf-called under his breath to the glinting, ever-changing flame which was the soul of Cleopatra.

Then, before he was aware of any change, the Museum wall disappeared. It did not shatter, it did not melt, it did not dissolve. It simply ceased to be, and he was staring at the gigantic figure of the Appraiser.

The body was the body of a man, but the head was the head of a dog — and had sad dog eyes. The Appraiser was absorbed and unapproachable as if he were leading a blind man, and he had an air of dependability so great that you would leave anything in his keeping or take his word on any matter — if he spoke. Even with his solemn, impersonal muzzle silhouetted against the flames of Hell, he was familiar. Then Mr. Randolph realized who it was. Anubis. On the walls of tombs along the Nile, he stood as he

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stood now, holding a balance in his godlike hand. Always he weighed a soul against the unaging Feather of Truth.

Mr. Randolph tried to see what his soul weighed, but the sulphur fumes were making his eyes water, and the red glare was trying. Everything grew a little indistinct. While he rubbed his eyes, the Appraiser vanished and Mr. Randolph found himself talking to the Prince of Darkness, who always concluded transactions personally.

"Of course," said the Prince, "your estimate of yourself was exaggerated. We had to spend a good deal of time seeing if we could give anything interesting for that soul of yours. As you probably know, the bottom has dropped out of the soul market. I'll have to take a terrific loss on my inventories. But," he added with professional cheerfulness, "I think we can reach an agreement. Instead of a ballerina, you can have as your mistress a pretty little woman who will find an affair with you vastly more exciting than PTA meetings. She will even prefer being with you to buying a becoming hat — and if you think this a trivial point, you do not know women very well." The Prince of Darkness smiled a wonderful, confidential smile which made Mr. Randolph know the Prince had seen into every heart and was putting all his knowledge at Mr. Randolph's disposal. "I'm afraid the lady will grow a little plump — eventually — but even Lady Hamilton put on weight. I can promise you big parts in any little theater production. Your home will be a house that you have remodeled charmingly, doing most of the work yourself. I'll accept any of your suggestions as to details — within reason, that is — though personally I see something small and Eighteenth Century, with brick painted white and potted evergreens in blue tubs —"

"I shall keep my soul," said Mr. Randolph loftily. He felt it slither back into his side, glad to be home. He turned sharply and jammed his hat on his head in spite of the fact that royalty was in the room. Then he stalked out of the antechamber of Hell.

In middle age Mr. Randolph was a moderately successful realtor. He never lied outright about properties he handled, no matter how great the temptation. Occasionally he lost a sale in this way, but his feeling of integrity was worth it. Of course if customers, quite on their own, made false deductions about houses he showed, that was their affair. After all he had to make a living.

He was genuinely kind to an aunt of his, and even sometimes went to church with her. He did this out of natural amiability, not because he hoped the old lady would leave him her money. Although he became, like Caesar, prematurely bald, he never lost his appeal. When he turned his dark eyes

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on women of any age, they were flattered. In the course of time, he sidestepped matrimony with two young things. He did it from acute dislike of mating April and — well, October.

He was always popular, with his fine Virginia breeding, and a wonderful, confidential smile (the original of which he never discussed). Presently he became convinced that his interview with the Prince of Darkness was only a dream. It seldom bothered him, although, after he learned he had a heart condition, he felt uneasy now and then. But even in the dream, he never actually sold anything to the Devil. He only thought of doing it.

He died, as he had done everything else, with an air. In the last instants, that air concealed something close to panic.

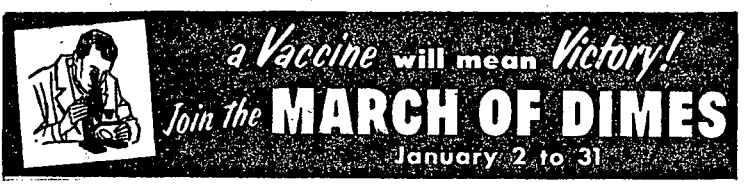
As the Pearly Gates swung open, St. Peter hurried out to meet Mr. Randolph. The latter recognised the Saint because of the keys he carried. They were utterly useless, the way the Gates worked now, but St. Peter liked them as a reminder of the past. The Saint smiled, for he saw Mr. Randolph was nervous. So the Saint talked soothingly, and because he was truly kind, came straight to the point.

"We've had all the work done on your soul," he said. "I shan't keep you in suspense. There were — uh — irregularities, and the Recording Angel felt he'd like the advice of an expert. So we called in a splendid appraiser — been in business for thousands of years."

A queer feeling came over Mr. Randolph. Heaven didn't shatter, melt, nor dissolve — but instead of golden streets and living waters, he saw the head of an enormously reliable dog, and he watched the infinitely skilled fingers balance a soul and weigh it against the unaging Feather of Truth.

"Of course the Appraiser's decision is final," murmured St. Peter.

Mr. Randolph found himself on his way home from the Little Theater, walking toward potted evergreens in blue tubs that flanked the Eighteenth Century door he had himself remodeled. He glanced at the pretty woman beside him. He had never felt more platonic. She was putting on weight, but then — Mr. Randolph thought tolerantly — even Lady Hamilton finally grew stout.



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There are a number of pseudoscientific ideas which now seem irrevocably associated with the unreadable early days of gadget-story science fiction, but once in a great while a clever writer will seize upon one of these hoary themes as a perfect subject for lighthearted modern farce — as, for instance, John Wyndham did in the memorable Perfect Creature *(F&SF, January, 1953). Now Winston Marks, one of the large number of bright young men to arise in the science-fantasy field in the last year or two, takes the ancient thesis of the over-stimulated and ever-expanding protozoon and produces a fine fresh piece of logical absurdity.*

Call Me Adam

by WINSTON MARKS

THIS FIRST two-hour session will be in the nature of a preliminary lecture. The board of regents insists that I repeat it each fall to satisfy morbid curiosity about my person, thus diminishing the distraction of my unique origin.

As you all know, my brother was an ameba, a single-celled animal of the Protozoa, Class Rhizopoda. The exact species is lost in the somewhat less than immaculate records kept by the infamous Dr. Bondi. Enough to say that my origin was the lillypond of Minnegala University campus, and the exact location of my birth, petri dish number 16, Room 22, in the Zoology Building of this campus.

Yes, I am still a unicellular animal, one huge ameba with many of the limitations of my microscopic brother. My man-size and man-mentality are the results of Dr. Bondi's immoral meddling. My human shape, however, is of my own choosing.

At this point there is always some doubt in the eyes of the freshman, so observe: My right hand, five fingers, opposed thumb and all. Watch carefully.

There, you see? It is a false appendage. The blob you now look upon is the pseudopodium, characteristic of amebic forms. With your permission, I reform it to its more useful shape.

My accelerated metabolism consumes considerable energy, and the nature of my "skin" is such that I must keep it moist. I lose much moisture

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by evaporation, so I must drink frequently or else remain submerged. The latter being impractical for lectures, you must put up with my imbibing.

I shall begin with the moment of my separation from my brother. In later lectures we shall explore certain parts of my racial memory, but today I wish only to satisfy your drooling inquisitiveness as to my person, my metamorphosis and the sordid events leading to my anthropomorphic development.

After fission I was hungry. The temperature was pleasing, and the nutrient solution in which I lay was rich in minerals and food. Ingesting was ecstasy. I relaxed and spread pseudopodia in long streamers to increase my surface area.

Allowed to continue this luxurious orgy, doubtless I should have divided again in a few hours, but suddenly I was sucked up rudely and dropped into cold, sterile water.

I became conscious of a complete absence of light, and all urge to fission fled. As I later deduced, Dr. Bondi had placed my new petri dish in a refrigerator.

As the temperature sank lower I began throwing out minerals to my exterior walls to form a protective pellicula, but before my encystment was well started, light returned and I was placed in another warm nutrient bath.

This time there was an alien salinity to the solution. I have wondered since whether Dr. Bondi was trying things at random, or whether he knew what he was doing. We shall never know; but if his original purpose was to cause me to grow without dividing, he succeeded very well.

The mildness of my state of uncertainty about my diet allowed me to ingest steadily, but my desire to reproduce was never permitted to develop. I might explain that the Protozoa require conditions within certain optimum limits to their liking before they will turn to the activity of fission. Dr. Bondi frustrated my reproductive instinct with his shifting diet and temperature variation.

From his notes we know that I reached a size visible to the naked eye in just a few days. Then, when I was about the size of a quarter, he began playing a needle point of brilliant light on a speck of my exterior.

Normally, I enjoyed light; but at first this brilliant spot was irritating, and I would try to retreat from it. Dr. Bondi would have none of this, however. He conditioned me to seek the light by reducing the nutrient value of my bath when I retreated and increasing it when I moved toward the light.

By the time my bulk was potato-size, I had developed a stigma, or light-sensitive spot, with which I sought to detect quickly the source of light which led me to a richer diet.

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At this stage of my development I became dimly aware that something or *someone* was manipulating my environment. For a Protozoan, this was an astute bit of ratiocination, but then I was being pushed to the limits of my irritability. The frustration of my urge to accomplish a long overdue act of reproduction was building unique stresses within my cytoplasm.

Now, when a bit of meat was dropped near me, instead of slowly rolling over and engulfing it, I would whip out a protoplasmic lash and snatch it to me. When the bright light flashed, I would exude a slender tail at once and wiggle like a pollywog to get my reward.

Bondi encouraged this more rapid activity by making my reward dependent upon the time in which I acted to claim it. As my bulk increased to the size of a watermelon, Bondi forced other adjustments upon me.

I began organizing for quicker and more successful action. I thickened my cytoplasm to a gelatinous consistency and located my nucleus next to my stigma, so that my light reaction would be swifter. Also, I formed delicate fibrillary networks to all parts of my outer integument which was toughening up to contain my greater bulk and weight-pressure.

These fibrillae served as strengthening members and as a somewhat specialized nervous system. Bondi made certain of this intellectual trend by instituting a series of punishments. When I reacted too slowly to a stimulus, such as the light, he would jab me with a needle or squirt acid on me. I learned to retreat quickly as well as to advance.

This bestial behavior of your "honored" Dr. Bondi also heightened my awareness of him and of the relationship which existed between us.

His alternating punishment and reward became more complex. The old "eat or be eaten" simplicity of primitive pond behavior was inadequate for peace in Bondi's torture tub. I was forced to distinguish between different intensities of lights to get my reward of horsemeat. Failure drew punishment.

Then he began lowering the level of my liquid bath, forcing me to protect my exposed portions by partial encystment. He insisted that I develop a "mouth" by eliminating nutrients from my shallow bath and offering food to me at a certain point, just below my stigma. This latter had developed into a well differentiated eye, although it never could be classed other than a temporary organellum.

At first sound vibrations were meaningless to me, but Bondi found certain frequencies and intensities that were painful enough to be useful as stimuli.

Again, by a system of reward and punishment, he forced me to develop my sensitivity to sound, and it was not long before I was making primitive advance-retreat responses to his spoken words.

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My weight at this time was approaching 100 pounds, and it was now that my highly titillated nervous system began advancing at an extremely rapid rate. My eagerness to avoid punishment was converted into a sharp curiosity about the multitude of impressions that bombarded my organella or pseudo-senses.

Bondi wrote of his great elation when I discovered that a second stigma, or eye, enabled me to see better. That day he fed me a whole fresh salmon.

From that time until this, my frustrated desire to reproduce has been sublimated into an intellectual curiosity. I will admit that had Bondi allowed me, in those days, to submerge in a peaceful bath without tormenting me, I should have gone into fission within hours.

The precise meaning of human emotions has always escaped me, but I suppose you could say I hated Dr. Bondi from my first awareness of him. My developing mind clawed at him for information to satisfy my new hunger, but it was in the manner in which a human scratches a mosquito bite—angrily—with a sort of masochistic pleasure.

Long before he was aware of it, I had a sizable basic vocabulary. Many of the words were simply exclamations of profanity to which the vile Dr. Bondi was addicted. These were the easiest, for usually they were accompanied by some wanton act of cruelty.

Learning to speak aloud myself, however, was somewhat more involved and came about partly through sheer chance.

My bulk had placed such a strain on my skin that I had to thicken it to support my weight. In doing so it lost much of its permeability to air. Being of aerobic nature, I adjusted to this by strengthening the walls of my gullet with a network of thick fibrillae, but maintaining a moist, oxygen-permeable area down its whole fifteen-inch length.

My chronic state of excitation consumed much oxygen, so to supply it to my limited gullet surface, I learned to pulsate the adjacent protoplasm. In short, I was using the deep, moist pit under my eyes as a sort of lung as well as an esophagus.

Because this exposed tissue was the most vulnerable, I kept the exterior "lips" nearly closed except when ingesting. The slot, then, was just large enough to admit the air.

One day when Bondi was displeased with me for some trivial failure, he jabbed me with a pair of electric test prods. It was a new form of indignity, and my whole gelatinous structure tensed up in an effort to escape. The air in my pseudo-lung, compressed by the tension, escaped in the blubbering sound that humans use to express derision — a fair imitation of your "razzberry."

I caught the significance even before Bondi, and I spent the periods

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of solitude in practising. At first the noise issuing from my own body was alarming, for some of the vibrations were transmitted too intimately to my nucleus. By varying the density of the cytoplasm around my "mouth" I managed to deaden the feedback until it was tolerable.

Without letting Bondi in on my discovery I worked for several nights during his absence. My knowledge of the structure of the tongue was extremely slight, since I had only glimpsed it in Bondi's mouth when he yawned or moistened his lips.

Experimenting constantly, however, I soon learned to wheeze some discernible syllables; and then it was only a matter of acoustic adjustment, labial manipulation and modulation.

My home now was the old-fashioned bathtub in Bondi's apartment. Unwilling to share the glory of his successful experiment with the biology department, he had kept the whole business a secret. I might insert here that this greed for recognition is one of the more incomprehensible qualities I find in the human race. Once a man's belly is full and he has bedded a female, his next consideration is to seek money, power, position or even notoriety.

This insane hunger for attention is the most complicating factor in your lives. Always, you are at least once removed from complete happiness. This I attribute to your lack of — of that *unity* which is inherent in the Protozoa.

Don't smirk! Remember, my race outnumbers yours a billion to one. You boast of your rugged individuality, yet each of you is a collection of single cells lumped into a ridiculous symbiotic travesty. Your parts war against each other, and inevitably the whole colony perishes in the civil war you refer to as senility.

Well, your precious Dr. Bondi was a particularly abominable example of the "colony" system. One moment he was petting me, feeding and encouraging me, and the next, he was subjecting me to endless tortures and indecencies out of the sadistic, schizophrenic nature of his perverted curiosity.

It was, therefore, with considerable satisfaction that I found it within my power to speak my mind to him. He came into the bathroom one morning, jabbed me and watched me quiver to make certain I was still alive, then turned to his shaving.

I waited until his face was fully lathered and he was scraping his wrinkled neck with a straight-edge razor before I gave voice.

Expanding my gullet, I drew a breath and said in a rumbling voice, "I hope you cut your throat, you son of a bitch!"

He did, too, but not nearly as seriously as I had hoped. He was so dumb-

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founded he turned and just stared at me with blood and lather running down his undershirt.

"You said something?" he asked at last.

Disgusted with the insignificance of the wound I had been able to cause, I refused to answer until he got the electric prod and waved it. "Talk, damn you!" he demanded.

I called him another name, and he was so elated that he dropped the prod. Instantly, I jammed out a tentacle from my ventral surface and drew the long, battery-filled weapon inside where I stowed it in a debris-vacuole.

From this inauspicious beginning, our communication grew into endless conversations in which I expanded my vocabulary and gained much useful knowledge.

After a few weeks, Bondi suggested that I try assuming various shapes. The following experiments were abhorrent. When I refused to cooperate he cursed at my indolence, called me a slug and a slob and insisted that I earn my keep by obliging his whim.

As you might guess, it is quite against an ameba's nature to hold a given form for any period of time. But Bondi enforced his demands, not only with physical punishment, but also by refusing to answer my questions.

As I said, my appetite for knowledge was voracious as a result of my sublimated — you might say — sex urge. So when Bondi held out on me I finally relented.

I formed myself into a sphere, a cube and a pyramid and then ran through a senseless series of polyhedral shapes. It occurred to him to show me some pictures of animals and make me simulate everything from an oversized mouse to a miniature polar bear, complete with long, white, hair-like cilia for fur.

To facilitate this dull posturing, Bondi tilted a mirror at the end of my tub, so I could see myself. He was despondent at my lack of reaction to my own image. I can't imagine what he expected. No ameba needs a mirror to visualize his appearance. A single glance at his departing brother satisfies any such curiosity.

The mirror did help in my morphic exercises, however. Soon I was adept at playing "statue" for the unspeakable idiot. Hardest was supporting myself on the slender appendages which his artistry demanded. It takes time to build internal skeletal supports, time and an abundance of minerals.

My exhaustion from these experiences caused me to tend to remain in whatever shape he left me. It was easier to remodel the pseudo-bones to new proportions than to reabsorb them and begin over each time. In this way I gradually overcame my aversion to retaining a given form.

To keep me in my tub and prevent attempts to escape, Bondi vividly

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described the fate I would suffer if I were turned loose in civilization. I would be deemed a monster, even in my original form, and I would be attacked and destroyed.

My nagging to be allowed outside the bathroom finally caused him to admit that he had two specific reasons for keeping me locked in. First, he said, he was afraid I would escape and find a pond or lake somewhere and go into immediate fission, breaking down until all my parts were microscopic again.

I argued, honestly enough, that my reproducing days were over. Were I to begin dividing back to normal size, all my progeny would suffer into eternity new hungers and fears.

The many unanswered questions that remained in my mind would be a dangerous legacy. Bondi had forced upon me a bite of the forbidden apple — this serpent in my Protozoan Garden of Eden. But I had no intention of repeating Adam's mistake. Never would I visit this curse, this thirst for knowledge upon my innocent brothers.

His second reason for delaying my egress to the outer world was vague. He merely said, "You aren't quite ready yet."

He soothed my impatience by teaching me to read. Already familiar with the structure of the language, I lacked only vocabulary. When he discovered my ability for absolute recall, Bondi gave me a dictionary. This was my reward for forming myself into a reasonable resemblance to an ape.

He kept me in this simian form, insisting that I spend a little longer on my "feet" each day until my skeletal structure was heavy enough to support me without sagging.

He did not insist upon teeth, but he fed me copious portions of minerals to implement my "bones". When I threatened to slump, un-mammal-like, or if I let my rump spread out in the tub, he would snatch away my dictionary.

One day I discovered that my strength was greater than his; so when he tried to take the book from me I held onto it. He turned out the bathroom light from the outside switch and locked the door.

Oh, yes, your brilliant Dr. Bondi had his depraved way with me regardless of the discomfort and distress it cost me.

My ability to read increased as I proceeded through the dictionary. By the time I had finished it, I could read, digest and absorb a whole page at a glance. Many of the words made no sense, of course, with no real-life referents.

The encyclopedia filled in the gaps wonderfully. Dr. Bondi riffled the "A" volume before me one morning, and I quivered with anticipation. He hung up a tall portrait of a human form and said, "You will now spend

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two hours a day transforming yourself into an *exact* replica of this picture. Your reward for progress will be one volume of this set."

I set to work with diligence. Before the first two-hour session was over I considered I had finished the chore. Dr. Bondi, when I called him, was of a different mind. He laughed at what he saw and said, "I want no sloppy approximations this time. Draw in that body hair! Your arms are not the same length, and your other proportions are all wrong. If you can read fine print, you can see this portrait more clearly than that."

He slammed the door and I went back to work. When he returned he was far from satisfied, but he let me have Volume I of the wonderful set of books anyway.

My skeleton was not difficult, for now I was used to the primate position. It was just a matter of altering proportions. The difficulty was my surface contours. Working from a two dimensional picture viewed from pseudo-eyes which were not at all accustomed to the evaluation of perspective, it was largely trial and error.

With Volume II, I got a more specific criticism of my work. Bondi tacked up some detail drawings of various parts of the desired anatomy, and this helped.

As we proceeded to refine the details of my physiognomy, my self-appointed Pygmalion became more and more picayunish in his demands. In spite of my infinite pains, he would snap, "Take up the slack there!" or, "Fill in that sink-hole!" He complained constantly at my lack of esthetic sense. If it wasn't a thick ankle it was a drooping pseudo-mammary.

In a heated argument over the latter organs, it emerged that I wasn't *supposed* to copy the model too closely. He wanted me to "improve" upon these items.

While I worked at perfecting such redundant adornments as fingernails, teeth, long, silky, blonde, ciliated filaments on my head and shorter "hair" for my eyebrows, lashes and so forth, Bondi accumulated articles of feminine clothing and made me get used to wearing them.

My reward was the limited freedom of his apartment. Now I had access to his library. It was even worth stumbling around in high heels to have the run of Bondi's reading collection. His tastes were quite catholic, and I worked my way through history, drama, detective novels and Shakespeare indiscriminately.

The human male's concept of beauty gradually dawned upon me from the endless stacks of men's magazines which he kept around his bachelor apartment. Slowly I deduced that the "good" doctor was striving to produce in my humanoid form those exterior refinements considered the essence of female pulchritude.

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It has always been assumed by the faculty of Minnegala University that Dr. Bondi was merely preparing me for presentation to the scientific world. Knowing well his flamboyant personality, they concluded that Bondi intended the disclosure to be as dramatic as he could contrive.

Since he disclosed no such intentions to me, I have not attempted to confirm nor deny the verity of these assumptions. His timely fall of six stories to the concrete below his bedroom window one evening brought our — relationship to an abrupt conclusion. Thus extinction, as it must to all mere men, came to Dr. Hellos K. Bondi.

After listening to his screams and viewing the crimson wreckage of his over-specialized cells below, I tried to return to my reading. An alarming thought disturbed me. I was a parasite, and my host was dead!

No, I was not a parasite like my cousins who live in the intestines of man and cause dysentery. My dependency on him was more in the nature of a wife, the clever female of the species, who, in some inexplicable manner, induces her mate to bring her food and drink and to otherwise provide for her peculiar wants.

Only I was even more dependent than that! Had not Bondi declared that I would be considered a monster by all others? When I ventured out to find my ration of horsemeat and vegetable debris, would they not kill me?

The disproof of this vicious lie was manifest minutes later. Footsteps pounded down the hall, and the door to the apartment was rammed in by a broad-shouldered policeman.

Two men in plain clothes held back a covey of gibbering neighbors, while the officer stopped before me and moved his mouth a dozen times without uttering a sound.

He stared at my golden hair, my black nylon slip, the copy of *Esquire* on my lap, and my high-heel shoes, and seemed to find the sight incomprehensible.

His entry had been so abrupt that I had no time to think. I simply sat and stared back.

"Lady," he said in a tight voice that sounded anything but menacing, "do you — live here?"

Bondi had preferred that I speak in a soprano voice, but this person was not Bondi, and it was much less constrictive on my sensitive gullet to speak with full open throat. In a voice somewhat lower than the officer's own I answered, "Yes, I live here."

Whether it was my words, my low tone of voice or just the fact that I failed to move my red-smeared lips when I spoke that galvanized the officer, I could not determine; but he wheeled and searched the whole

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apartment on the dead run. He returned sweating and puzzled. "Lady, don't you realize that your — that —"

He went in and stared from the lethal bedroom window. He shouted down, "Are you sure that I. D. reads apartment 606?" Apparently the answer to his question failed to put him at ease, but he seemed to have reached some decision when he confronted me again.

"I'm afraid I have pretty awful news for you, Miss — Mrs. Bondi. Your, uh, Mr. Bondi — he's — no longer in his bedroom. He's — downstairs." He pointed down with a long, trembling finger.

I said, "Yes?" I remembered to raise my voice.

"Mam, you don't understand," he said, much agitated. "Mr. Bondi *did not* step out for a package of smokes. Now, if you'll just slip into something and come down to the station with us —"

Into just what I was supposed to slip he did not indicate, and when I failed to respond he rummaged through Bondi's closets muttering, dear him, dear him! I owned no dresses.

He came back empty-handed and hostile. After conferring softly with the two plain-clothes men, he set the fallen door in place and told me that a person called "The Captain" would have to check on this personally. I was to remain. An officer would guard my door from the outside, "so don't try any funny stuff."

It was well past my feeding time now, so I rapped on the inside of the splintered door.

The guard said, "What do ya want?"

"I need nourishment," I told him.

"Later, when the captain comes," he said.

"I need it now," I insisted. "I'm beginning to attenuate."

There was a brief silence, then he asked, "That's bad?"

"Very," I said.

"Hmm," he said. "There's a kid out here. I'll send him out for something. What would you like?"

"The usual," I told him. "Some carrot tops, potato peelings and coffee grounds. And the horsemeat, of course."

The background of murmuring voices died away out in the hall, and even the shuffling feet quieted.

The guard muttered, "These beautiful dames, always sarcastic! Just for that she can go hungry."

He wouldn't respond to my further requests.

In order to keep me at a stable size, Bondi had rationed me severely, so that by the time the Captain arrived all I could think of was something to eat. The man with the gold-trimmed visor took a swift look around, threw

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one of Bondi's trenchcoats about me and growled, "Come on, sweetie, down to H. Q. with you."

At the station I refused to answer questions. I kept demanding nourishment until finally they locked me into a cell and sent out for a tray.

By the time I had eaten the hamburgers and French fries it was late, and they decided to delay questioning until morning. I spent a very restless night, for amebae rarely indulge in the comatose condition which most nearly approximates sleep except at times of reproduction — and nothing was further from my mind at the present.

I paced the floor until morning. After a rather pallid meal I was brought before a judge for a hearing. He asked my name. Bondi had once called me "Adam," but lately he had referred to me only as "Honey."

"My name is Adam Honey," I said.

The clerk looked at me, nodded and said, "Oh. Honey Adams," and wrote it down.

The judge said, "What is your occupation?" When I failed to answer he said, "What do you do? What are you?"

"I'm an overgrown ameba," I said straightforwardly.

The police sergeant who had me by the elbow flushed and said, "And I'm a monkey's uncle. Now show his honor some respect before he holds you in contempt."

So much of the following conversation was in legal jargon and police idiom that it made no sense to me. However, certain phrases such as "premeditated homicide" and "hot seat" the matron later interpreted to me. Remembering Bondi's electric prod, I was reasonably certain that the barbaric method would work equally well on me.

So that night I flattened my profile temporarily and escaped through the bars, down the hall and out to the street while the matron was off getting me a bucket of water.

Swiftly I learned that the streets of your cities after midnight are populated entirely by males of extremely solicitous nature toward pretty females. It was quite warm, so I had not bothered to button and belt my trench coat.

I won't detail the series of surprising incidents which I encountered. Suffice it to say that after several distressing experiences, each of which rendered my male companion ultimately unconscious in a deep faint, I decided that my present form was a serious threat to my anonymity.

In the gloom of some nameless hotel room, I set about changing my appearance to that of a human male. The only face and form with which I was intimately familiar was that of the deceased Dr. Bondi. So, standing in front of the dresser mirror, and illuminated only by a flashing electric sign outside the window, I resorbed most of my long hair-like cilia, my excessive

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mammaries, which had grown pendulous in the excitement, and drew in the soft curves of my face to conform to the sharp nose and chin of my previous associate.

It was a perfunctory job, but dressed in the male slacks, shirt and bow tie which I had stripped from my last victim, the effect was an improvement. Honey Adams was no more.

In spite of my voluminous reading my knowledge of the customs of man were sketchy. I was aware that a system of barter involving currency and coin required one to engage in labor to secure food and a suitable environment.

My wants were extremely elementary: To exist and to learn. Since the University was a center of learning, I decided I should become a professor such as Dr. Bondi had been. His earnings seemed adequate, and I knew of the wonderful access he had to the acres of bookshelves at the school.

The pants which I wore had money in the pockets, so I engaged a taxi to take me to the Administration Building of the University of Minnegala. The driver delivered me in the pitch blackness of predawn, with the remark, "You're a little early for classes, mister."

It had not occurred to me that such a magnificent institution would waste so much time in idleness, but it was so. I sat on the marble steps for hours before anyone showed up, but eventually I found myself in the office of President Prellknock.

He was courteous but a little startled when I introduced myself as "Dr. Hellos Adams."

"That's queer," he said. "You not only look like a blond version of our deceased Dr. Bondi, but you have his same first name."

Then I realized that I had forgotten to re-pigment my hair.

He remarked uneasily about the similarity at some length and finally asked, "What is the nature of your business, Dr. Adams?"

"I need employment," I told him. "I thought it would be nice to be a professor. I have a great desire for learning, and it would be convenient to be associated with a school in which so much erudition is concentrated."

Dr. Prellknock swallowed several times and asked mildly, "What are your qualifications?"

I started to list my reading accomplishments. "I know the encyclopedia, the unabridged dictionary, the —"

"You *know* them?"

"Verbatim. Every word," I assured him.

His face looked somewhat haggard. There were dark circles and swollen puffs under his eyes as if he hadn't slept well. While he ruminated, my gaze wandered over his desk and was caught by a large pile of papers and books

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which looked sharply familiar. The top notebook was labelled,

PROJECT ADAM
(The Culture of Macroscopic Amebae)
Vol. I.

I deduced that Dr. Bondi's private experimental records had been turned over to the President of the University, and that he had spent much of the night poring over them.

He shook his head and rubbed his eyes. "You must forgive me. I have suffered several shocks in the past twenty-four hours — the death of Dr. Bondi — and, well, several other matters." His eyes flicked to the pile of notebooks.

"The poor fellow," he went on, "was quite insane. Extremely high moral character. Got mixed up with some woman. To justify himself, he invented an utterly fantastic story — a whole case history of an experiment he was supposed to have —" He broke off. "This isn't your affair, however."

"To the contrary," I said. "I felt that Dr. Bondi's sudden death would have left you with an opening in your faculty. It is his position for which I am applying."

I couldn't know how cold-blooded and ghoulish my statement would sound. But underlying his expression of disapproval was an almost incredulous fascination in me.

"You — you read it in the papers, I presume?"

"No, sir," I said. "I was present at the time of the — the accident. In fact, you might say I was instrumental."

"You?" The President became inarticulate, and there was horror in his eyes.

So I explained further. "Dr. Bondi was displeased with me. He was making me practise my walk, and I couldn't seem to get it right. Finally he explained, 'You walk as if you had a rod up your spine!' I responded that indeed I did. It was a long, tubular, electric prod with which he used to punish me, and which I had grasped and secreted within my protoplasm to prevent his abusing me with it. Well, he had forgotten, and he called me a liar, so to prove it I protruded the end of the prod out through the integument between my shoulders.

"Dr. Bondi was so enraged that he grasped it and jerked it most painfully from me. Then he brandished it, and I thought he was about to use it on me, so I struck out at him in self-defense.

"The window was behind him," I concluded.

Dr. Prellknock was on his feet now, and his flesh was even whiter than my own before Dr. Bondi began feeding me carmine red for pigmenting material.

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"Then — then you are —" He couldn't finish.

"I am Dr. Bondi's macroscopic amebae," I admitted.

"Why didn't you say so in the first place?" he demanded.

"You didn't ask me," I pointed out.

Ultimately I secured the position which I had requested, but not before every bulging-eyed, goateed, bespectacled, long-fingered biologist in the world had poked at me, ogled, smelled, touched and listened futilely for my non-existent heartbeat.

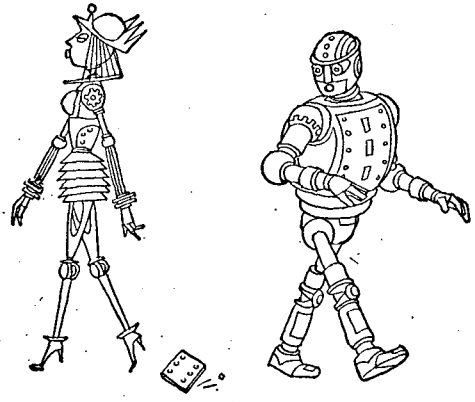
That was some 85 years ago, of course, and my present academic post is somewhat different these days. We have accomplished much in my field.

As you know, all human diseases caused by microorganisms have long since been conquered, largely through my good offices. Man and microbe now live in complete symbiotic harmony, to the ultimate benefit of both.

Which brings us to the subject of this course in which you have enrolled. Tomorrow will begin the formal lectures on Introductions to Socio-Symbiotic Relationships Between Man and the Protozoa.

Those of you planning to pursue the field of bacteriology and protozoology will, I feel, find my lectures and point of view quite rewarding.

Thank you for your attention. Class is dismissed.



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"Chessplayers don't like fantasy," says the boy-genius Timothy Paul, in Wilmar Shiras' classic In Hiding, *"and nobody else likes chess." Well, this thesis was pretty thoroughly disproved by the enthusiasm of both chessplayers and fantasy readers for Charles L. Harness'* The Chessplayers *in our October issue; but we're still in sympathy with Timothy's other contention, that "in* THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS, *it wasn't a very good chess game, and you couldn't see the relation of the moves to the story." Even as devout Carrollians, we have felt with Timothy that The Chess-Game Story still needed to be written; and now Poul Anderson, bless him, has done it, combining a firstrate game, a touch of science fiction and his own incomparable romantic sweep into a tragic epic in which the chessboard becomes transmuted into Matthew Arnold's "darkling plain, swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight."*

The Immortal Game

by POUL ANDERSON

THE FIRST trumpet sounded far and clear and brazen cold, and Rogard the Bishop stirred to wakefulness with it. Lifting his eyes, he looked through the suddenly rustling, murmuring line of soldiers, out across the broad plain of Cinnabar and the frontier, and over to the realm of LEUKAS.

Away there, across the somehow unreal red-and-black distances of the steppe, he saw sunlight flash on armor and caught the remote wild flutter of lifted banners. *So it is war*, he thought. *So we must fight again.*

Again? He pulled his mind from the frightening dimness of that word. Had they ever fought before?

On his left, Sir Ocher laughed aloud and clanged down the vizard on his gay young face. It gave him a strange, inhuman look, he was suddenly a featureless thing of shining metal and nodding plumes, and the steel echoed in his voice: "Ha, a fight! Praise God, Bishop, for I had begun to fear I would rust here forever."

Slowly, Rogard's mind brought forth wonder. "Were you sitting and thinking — before now?" he asked.

"Why —" Sudden puzzlement in the reckless tones: "I think I was. . . .

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Was I?" Fear turning into defiance: "Who cares? I've got some LEUKANS to kill!" Ocher reared in his horse till the great metallic wings thundered.

On Rogard's right, Flambard the King stood, tall in crown and robes. He lifted an arm to shade his eyes against the blazing sunlight. "They are sending DIOMES, the royal guardsman, first," he murmured. "A good man." The coolness of his tone was not matched by the other hand, its nervous plucking at his beard.

Rogard turned back, facing over the lines of Cinnabar to the frontier. DIOMES, the LEUKAN King's own soldier, was running. The long spear flashed in his hand, his shield and helmet threw back the relentless light in a furious dazzle, and Rogard thought he could hear the clashing of iron. Then that noise was drowned in the trumpets and drums and yells from the ranks of Cinnabar, and he had only his eyes.

DIOMES leaped two squares before coming to a halt on the frontier. He stopped then, stamping and thrusting against the Barrier which suddenly held him, and cried challenge. A muttering rose among the cuirassed soldiers of Cinnabar, and spears lifted before the flowing banners.

King Flambard's voice was shrill as he leaned forward and touched his own guardsman with his scepter. "Go, Carlon! Go to stop him!"

"Aye, sire." Carlon's stocky form bowed, and then he wheeled about and ran, holding his spear aloft, until he reached the frontier. Now he and DIOMES stood face to face, snarling at each other across the Barrier, and for a sick moment Rogard wondered what those two had done, once in an evil and forgotten year, that there should be such hate between them.

"Let me go, sire!" Ocher's voice rang eerily from the slit-eyed mask of his helmet. The winged horse stamped on the hard red ground, and the long lance swept a flashing arc. "Let me go next."

"No, no, Sir Ocher." It was a woman's voice. "Not yet. There'll be enough for you and me to do, later in this day."

Looking beyond Flambard, the Bishop saw his Queen, Evyan the Fair, and there was something within him which stumbled and broke into fire. Very tall and lovely was the gray-eyed Queen of Cinnabar, where she stood in armor and looked out at the growing battle. Her sun-browned young face was coifed in steel, but one rebellious lock blew forth in the wind, and she brushed at it with a gauntleted hand while the other drew her sword snaking from its sheath. "Now may God strengthen our arms," she said, and her voice was low and sweet. Rogard drew his cope tighter about him and turned his mitered head away with a sigh. But there was a bitter envy in him for Columbard, the Queen's Bishop of Cinnabar.

Drums thumped from the LEUKAN ranks, and another soldier ran forth. Rogard sucked his breath hissingly in, for this man came till he stood on

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DIOMES' right. And the newcomer's face was sharp and pale with fear. There was no Barrier between him and Carlon.

"To his death," muttered Flambard between his teeth. "They sent that fellow to his death."

Carlon snarled and advanced on the LEUKAN. He had little choice — if he waited, he would be slain, and his King had not commanded him to wait. He leaped, his spear gleamed, and the LEUKAN soldier toppled and lay emptily sprawled in the black square.

"First blood!" cried Evyan, lifting her sword and hurling sunbeams from it. "First blood for us!"

Aye, so, thought Rogard bleakly, *but King* MIKILLATI *had a reason for sacrificing that man. Maybe we should have let Carlon die. Carlon the bold, Carlon the strong, Carlon the lover of laughter. Maybe we should have let him die.*

And now the Barrier was down for Bishop ASATOR of LEUKAS, and he came gliding down the red squares, high and cold in his glistening white robes, until he stood on the frontier. Rogard thought he could see ASATOR's eyes as they swept over Cinnabar. The LEUKAN Bishop was poised to rush in with his great mace should Flambard, for safety, seek to change with Earl Ferric as the Law permitted.

Law?

There was no time to wonder what the Law was, or why it must be obeyed, or what had gone before this moment of battle. Queen Evyan had turned and shouted to the soldier Raddic, guardsman of her own Knight Sir Cupran: "Go! Halt him!" And Raddic cast her his own look of love, and ran, ponderous in his mail, up to the frontier. There he and ASATOR stood, no Barrier between them if either used a flanking move.

Good! Oh, good, my Queen! thought Rogard wildly. For even if ASATOR did not withdraw, but slew Raddic, he would be in Raddic's square, and his threat would be against a wall of spears. *He will retreat, he will retreat —*

Iron roared as ASATOR's mace crashed through helm and skull and felled Raddic the guardsman.

Evyan screamed, once only. "And I sent him! I sent him!" Then she began to run.

"Lady!" Rogard hurled himself against the Barrier. He could not move, he was chained here in his square, locked and barred by a Law he did not understand, while his lady ran toward death. "O Evyan, Evyan!"

Straight as a flying javelin ran the Queen of Cinnabar. Turning, straining after her, Rogard saw her leap the frontier and come to a halt by the Barrier which marked the left-hand bound of the kingdoms, beyond which lay only dimness to the frightful edge of the world. There she wheeled to face the dis-

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mayed ranks of LEUKAS, and her cry drifted back like the shriek of a stooping hawk: "MIKILLATI! Defend yourself!"

The thunder-crack of cheering from Cinnabar drowned all answer, but Rogard saw, at the very limits of his sight, how hastily King MIKILLATI stepped from the line of her attack, into the stronghold of Bishop ASATOR. Now, thought Rogard fiercely, now the white-robed ruler could never seek shelter from one of his Earls. Evyan had stolen his greatest shield.

"Hola, my Queen!" With a sob of laughter, Ocher struck spurs into his horse. Wings threshed, blowing Rogard's cope about him, as the Knight hurtled over the head of his own guardsman and came to rest two squares in front of the Bishop. Rogard fought down his own anger; he had wanted to be the one to follow Evyan. But Ocher was a better choice.

Oh, much better! Rogard gasped as his flittering eyes took in the broad battlefield. In the next leap, Ocher could cut down DIOMES, and then between them he and Evyan could trap MIKILLATI!

Briefly, that puzzlement nagged at the Bishop. Why should men die to catch someone else's King? What was there in the Law that said Kings should strive for mastery of the world and —

"Guard yourself, Queen!" Sir MERKON, King's Knight of LEUKAS, sprang in a move like Ocher's. Rogard's breath rattled in his throat with bitterness, and he thought there must be tears in Evyan's bright eyes. Slowly, then, the Queen withdrew two squares along the edge, until she stood in front of Earl Ferric's guardsman. It was still a good place to attack from, but not what the other had been.

BOAN, guardsman of the LEUKAN Queen DOLORA, moved one square forward, so that he protected great DIOMES from Ocher. Ocher snarled and sprang in front of Evyan, so that he stood between her and the frontier: clearing the way for her, and throwing his own protection over Carlon.

MERKON jumped likewise, landing to face Ocher with the frontier between them. Rogard clenched his mace and vision blurred for him; the LEUKANS were closing in on Evyan.

"Ulfar!" cried the King's Bishop. "Ulfar, can you help her?"

The stout old yeoman who was guardsman of the Queen's Bishop nodded wordlessly and ran one square forward. His spear menaced Bishop ASATOR, who growled at him — no Barrier between those two now!

MERKON of LEUKAS made another soaring leap, landing three squares in front of Rogard. "Guard yourself!" the voice belled from his faceless helmet. "Guard yourself, O Queen!"

No time now to let Ulfar slay ASATOR. Evyan's great eyes looked wildly about her; then, with swift decision, she stepped between MERKON and Ocher. Oh, a lovely move! Out of the fury in his breast, Rogard laughed.

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The guardsman of the LEUKAN King's Knight clanked two squares ahead, lifting his spear against Ocher. It must have taken boldness thus to stand before Evyan herself; but the Queen of Cinnabar saw that if she cut him down, the Queen of LEUKAS could slay her. "Get free, Ocher!" she cried. "Get away!" Ocher cursed and leaped from danger, landing in front of Rogard's guardsman.

The King's Bishop bit his lip and tried to halt the trembling in his limbs. How the sun blazed! Its light was a cataract of dry white fire over the barren red and black squares. It hung immobile, enormous in the vague sky, and men gasped in their armor. The noise of bugles and iron, hoofs and wings and stamping feet, was loud under the small wind that blew across the world. There had never been anything but this meaningless war, there would never be aught else, and when Rogard tried to think beyond the moment when the fight had begun, or the moment when it would end, there was only an abyss of darkness.

Earl RAFAEON of LEUKAS took one ponderous step toward his King, a towering figure of iron readying for combat. Evyan whooped. "Ulfar!" she yelled. "Ulfar, your chance!"

Columbard's guardsman laughed aloud. Raising his spear, he stepped over into the square held by ASATOR. The white-robed Bishop lifted his mace, futile and feeble, and then he rolled in the dust at Ulfar's feet. The men of Cinnabar howled and clanged sword on shield.

Rogard held aloof from triumph. ASATOR, he thought grimly, had been expendable anyway. King MIKILLATI had something else in mind.

It was like a blow when he saw Earl RAFAEON's guardsman run forward two squares and shout to Evyan to guard herself. Raging, the Queen of Cinnabar withdrew a square to her rearward. Rogard saw sickly how unprotected King Flambard was now, the soldiers scattered over the field and the hosts of LEUKAS marshaling. But Queen DOLORA, he thought with a wild clutching of hope, Queen DOLORA, her tall cold beauty was just as open to a strong attack.

The soldier who had driven Evyan back took a leap across the frontier. "Guard yourself, O Queen!" he cried again. He was a small, hard-bitten, unkempt warrior in dusty helm and corselet. Evyan cursed, a bouncing soldierly oath, and moved one square forward to put a Barrier between her and him. He grinned impudently in his beard.

It is ill for us, it is a bootless and evil day. Rogard tried once more to get out of his square and go to Evyan's aid, but his will would not carry him. The Barrier held, invisible and uncrossable, and the Law held, the cruel and senseless Law which said a man must stand by and watch his lady be slain, and he railed at the bitterness of it and lapsed into a gray waiting.

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Trumpets lifted brazen throats, drums boomed, and Queen DOLORA of LEUKAS stalked forth into battle. She came high and white and icily fair, her face chiseled and immobile in its haughtiness under the crowned helmet, and stood two squares in front of her husband, looming over Carlon. Behind her, her own Bishop SORKAS poised in his stronghold, hefting his mace in armored hands. Carlon of Cinnabar spat at DOLORA's feet, and she looked at him from cool blue eyes and then looked away. The hot dry wind did not ruffle her long pale hair; she was like a statue, standing there and waiting.

"Ocher," said Evyan softly, "out of my way."

"I like not retreat, my lady," he answered in a thin tone.

"Nor I," said Evyan. "But I must have an escape route open. We will fight again."

Slowly, Ocher withdrew, back to his own home. Evyan chuckled once, and a wry grin twisted her young face.

Rogard was looking at her so tautly that he did not see what was happening until a great shout of iron slammed his head around. Then he saw Bishop SORKAS, standing in Carlon's square with a bloodied mace in his hands, and Carlon lay dead at his feet.

Carlon, your hands are empty, life has slipped from them and there is an unending darkness risen in you who loved the world. Goodnight, my Carlon, goodnight.

"Madame —" Bishop SORKAS spoke quietly, bowing a little, and there was a smile on his crafty face. "I regret, madame, that — ah —"

"Yes. I must leave you." Evyan shook her head, as if she had been struck, and moved a square backwards and sideways. Then, turning, she threw the glance of an eagle down the black squares to LEUKAS' Earl ARACLES. He looked away nervously, as if he would crouch behind the three soldiers who warded him. Evyan drew a deep breath sobbing into her lungs.

Sir THEUTAS, DOLORA's Knight, sprang from his stronghold, to place himself between Evyan and the Earl. Rogard wondered dully if he meant to kill Ulfar the soldier; he could do it now. Ulfar looked at the Knight who sat crouched, and hefted his spear and waited for his own weird.

"Rogard!"

The Bishop leaped, and for a moment there was fire-streaked darkness before his eyes.

"Rogard, to me! To me, and help sweep them from the world!"

Evyan's voice.

She stood in her scarred and dinted armor, holding her sword aloft, and on that smitten field she was laughing with a new-born hope. Rogard could not shout his reply. There were no words. But he raised his mace and ran.

The black squares slid beneath his feet, footfalls pounding, jarring his

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teeth, muscles stretching with a resurgent glory and all the world singing. At the frontier, he stopped, knowing it was Evyan's will though he could not have said how he knew. Then he faced about, and with clearing eyes looked back over that field of iron and ruin. Save for one soldier, Cinnabar was now cleared of LEUKAN forces, Evyan was safe, a counterblow was readying like the first whistle of hurricane. Before him were the proud banners of LEUKAS — now to throw them into the dust! Now to ride with Evyan into the home of MIKILLATI!

"Go to it, sir," rumbled Ulfar, standing on the Bishop's right and looking boldly at the white Knight who could slay him. "Give 'em hell from us."

Wings beat in the sky, and THEUTAS soared down to land on Rogards' left. In the hot light, the blued metal of his armor was like running water. His horse snorted, curveting and flapping its wings; he sat it easily, the lance swaying in his grasp, the blank helmet turned to Flambard. One more such leap, reckoned Rogard wildly, and he would be able to assail the King of Cinnabar. Or — no — a single spring from here and he would spit Evyan on his lance.

And there is a Barrier between us!

"Watch yourself, Queen!" The arrogant LEUKAN voice boomed hollow out of the steel mask.

"Indeed I will, Sir Knight!" There was only laughter in Evyan's tone. Lightly, then, she sped up the row of black squares. She brushed by Rogard, smiling at him as she ran, and he tried to smile back but his face was stiffened. Evyan, Evyan, she was plunging alone into her enemy's homeland!

Iron belled and clamored. The white guardsman in her path toppled and sank at her feet. One fist lifted strengthlessly, and a dying shrillness was in the dust: "Curse you, curse you, MIKILLATI, curse you for a stupid fool, leaving me here to be slain — no, no, no —"

Evyan bestrode the body and laughed again in the very face of Earl ARACLES. He cowered back, licking his lips — he could not move against her, but she could annihilate him in one more step. Beside Rogard, Ulfar whooped, and the trumpets of Cinnabar howled in the rear.

Now the great attack was launched! Rogard cast a fleeting glance at Bishop SORKAS. The lean white-coped form was gliding forth, mace swinging loose in one hand, and there was a little sleepy smile on the pale face. No dismay —? SORKAS halted, facing Rogard, and smiled a little wider, skinning his teeth without humor. "You can kill me if you wish," he said softly. "But do you?"

For a moment Rogard wavered. To smash that head —!

"Rogard! Rogard, to me!"

Evyan's cry jerked the King's Bishop around. He saw now what her

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plan was, and it dazzled him so that he forgot all else. LEUKAS *is ours!*

Swiftly he ran. DIOMES and BOAN howled at him as he went between them, brushing impotent spears against the Barriers. He passed Queen DOLORA, and her lovely face was as if cast in steel, and her eyes followed him as he charged over the plain of LEUKAS. Then there was no time for thinking, Earl RAFAEON loomed before him, and he jumped the last boundary into the enemy's heartland.

The Earl lifted a meaningless ax. The Law read death for him, and Rogard brushed aside the feeble stroke. The blow of his mace shocked in his own body, slamming his jaws together. RAFAEON crumpled, falling slowly, his armor loud as he struck the ground. Briefly, his fingers clawed at the iron-hard black earth, and then he lay still.

They have slain Raddic and Carlon — we have three guardsmen, a Bishop, and an Earl — Now we need only be butchers! Evyan, Evyan, warrior Queen, this is your victory!

DIOMES of LEUKAS roared and jumped across the frontier. Futile, futile, he was doomed to darkness. Evyan's lithe form moved up against ARACLES, her sword flamed and the Earl crashed at her feet. Her voice was another leaping brand: "Defend yourself, King!"

Turning, Rogard grew aware that MIKILLATI himself had been right beside him. There was a Barrier between the two men — but MIKILLATI had to retreat from Evyan, and he took one step foreward and sideways. Peering into his face, Rogard felt a sudden coldness. There was no defeat there, it was craft and knowledge and an unbending steel will — *what was* LEUKAS *planning?*

Evyan tossed her head, and the wind fluttered the lock of hair like a rebel banner. "We have them, Rogard!" she cried.

Far and faint, through the noise and confusion of battle, Cinnabar's bugles sounded the command of her King. Peering into the haze, Rogard saw that Flambard was taking precautions. Sir THEUTAS was still a menace, where he stood beside SORKAS. Sir Cupran of Cinnabar flew heavily over to land in front of the Queen's Earl's guardsman, covering the route THEUTAS must follow to endanger Flambard.

Wise, but — Rogard looked again at MIKILLATI's chill white face, and it was as if a breath of cold blew through him. Suddenly he wondered why they fought. For victory, yes, for mastery over the world — but when the battle had been won, what then?

He couldn't think past that moment. His mind recoiled in horror he could not name. In that instant he knew icily that this was not the first war in the world, there had been others before, and there would be others again. *Victory is death.*

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But Evyan, glorious Evyan, she could not die. She would reign over all the world and —

Steel blazed in Cinnabar. MERKON of LEUKAS came surging forth, one tigerish leap which brought him down on Ocher's guardsman. The soldier screamed, once, as he fell under the trampling, tearing hoofs, but it was lost in the shout of the LEUKAN Knight: "Defend yourself, Flambard! Defend yourself!"

Rogard gasped. It was like a blow in the belly. He had stood triumphant over the world, and now all in one swoop it was brought toppling about him. THEUTAS shook his lance, SORKAS his mace, DIOMES raised a bull's bellow — somehow, incredibly somehow, the warriors of LEUKAS had entered Cinnabar and were thundering at the King's own citadel.

"No, no —" Looking down the long empty row of squares, Rogard saw that Evyan was weeping. He wanted to run to her, hold her close and shield her against the falling world, but the Barriers were around him. He could not stir from his square, he could only watch.

Flambard cursed lividly and retreated into his Queen's home. His men gave a shout and clashed their arms — there was still a chance!

No, not while the Law bound men, thought Rogard, not while the Barriers held. Victory was ashen, and victory and defeat alike were darkness.

Beyond her thinly smiling husband, Queen DOLORA swept forward. Evyan cried out as the tall white woman halted before Rogard's terrified guardsman, turned to face Flambard where he crouched, and called to him: "Defend yourself, King!"

"No — no — you fool!" Rogard reached out, trying to break the Barrier, clawing at MIKILLATI. "Can't you see, none of us can win, it's death for us all if the war ends. Call her back!"

MIKILLATI ignored him. He seemed to be waiting.

And Ocher of Cinnabar raised a huge shout of laughter. It belled over the plain, dancing joyous mirth, and men lifted weary heads and turned to the young Knight where he sat in his own stronghold, for there was youth and triumph and glory in his laughing. Swiftly, then, a blur of steel, he sprang, and his winged horse rushed out of the sky on DOLORA herself. She turned to meet him, lifting her sword, and he knocked it from her hand and stabbed with his own lance. Slowly, too haughty to scream, the white Queen sank under his horse's hoofs.

And MIKILLATI smiled.

"I see," nodded the visitor. "Individual computers, each controlling its own robot piece by a tight beam, and all the computers on a given side linked to form a sort of group-mind constrained to obey the rules of chess and make the best

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possible moves. Very nice. And it's a pretty cute notion of yours, making the robots look like medieval armies." His glance studied the tiny figures where they moved on the oversized board under one glaring floodlight.

"Oh, that's pure frippery," said the scientist. "This is really a serious research project in multiple computer-linkages. By letting them play game after game, I'm getting some valuable data."

"It's a lovely set-up," said the visitor admiringly. "Do you realize that in this particular contest the two sides are reproducing one of the great classic games?"

"Why, no. Is that a fact?"

"Yes. It was a match between Anderssen and Kieseritsky, back in — I forget the year, but it was quite some time ago. Chess books often refer to it as the Immortal Game. . . . So your computers must share many of the properties of a human brain."

"Well, they're complex things, all right," admitted the scientist. "Not all their characteristics are known yet. Sometimes my chessmen surprise even me."

"Hm." The visitor stooped over the board. "Notice how they're jumping around inside their squares, waving their arms, batting at each other with their weapons?" He paused, then murmured slowly: "I wonder — I wonder if your computers may not have consciousness. If they might not have — minds."

"Don't get fantastic," snorted the scientist.

"But how do you know?" persisted the visitor. "Look, your feedback arrangement is closely analogous to a human nervous sytem. How do you know that your individual computers, even if they are constrained by the group linkage, don't have individual personalities? How do you know that their electronic senses don't interpret the game as, oh, as an interplay of free will and necessity; how do you know they don't receive the data of the moves as their own equivalent of blood, sweat, and tears?" He shuddered a little.

"Nonsense," grunted the scientist. "They're only robots. Now — Hey! Look there! Look at that move!"

Bishop SORKAS took one step ahead, into the black square adjoining Flambard's. He bowed and smiled. "The war is ended," he said.

Slowly, very slowly, Flambard looked about him. SORKAS, MERKON, THEUTAS, they were crouched to leap on him wherever he turned; his own men raged helpless against the Barriers; there was no place for him to go.

He bowed his head. "I surrender," he whispered.

Rogard looked across the red and the black to Evyan. Their eyes met, and they stretched out their arms to each other.

"Checkmate," said the scientist. "That game's over."

He crossed the room to the switchboard and turned off the computers.

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Here's a genuine novelty for you: in the author's words, "undoubtedly the only piece of published Asimov that no s. f. aficionado has ever seen." (Though we doubt if very many aficionados have seen what his colleagues at Boston University consider the only important published Asimov — a little opus called BIOCHEMISTRY AND HUMAN METABOLISM.*) This short-short story was written for a syndicated newspaper page for children; but Mr. Asimov, like every good writer of children's stories, is talking not only to the children but to all of us. His characters here are young, but the idea behind the story is as timeless as it is acute.*

The Fun They Had

by ISAAC ASIMOV

MARGIE EVEN WROTE about it that night in her diary. On the page headed May 17, 2155, she wrote, "Today Tommy found a real book!"

It was a very old book. Margie's grandfather once said that when he was a little boy *his* grandfather told him that there was a time when all stories were printed on paper.

They turned the pages, which were yellow and crinkly, and it was awfully funny to read words that stood still instead of moving the way they were supposed to — on a screen, you know. And then, when they turned back to the page before, it had the same words on it that it had had when they read it the first time.

"Gee," said Tommy, "what a waste. When you're through with the book, you just throw it away, I guess. Our television screen must have had a million books on it and it's good for plenty more. I wouldn't throw *it* away."

"Same with mine," said Margie. She was eleven and hadn't seen as many telebooks as Tommy had. He was thirteen.

She said, "Where did you find it?"

"In my house." He pointed without looking, because he was busy reading. "In the attic."

"What's it about?"

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"School."

Margie was scornful. "School? What's there to write about school? I hate school." Margie always hated school, but now she hated it more than ever. The mechanical teacher had been giving her test after test in geography and she had been doing worse and worse until her mother had shaken her head sorrowfully and sent for the County Inspector.

He was a round little man with a red face and a whole box of tools with dials and wires. He smiled at her and gave her an apple, then took the teacher apart. Margie had hoped he wouldn't know how to put it together again, but he knew how all right and after an hour or so, there it was again, large and black and ugly with a big screen on which all the lessons were shown and the questions were asked. That wasn't so bad. The part she hated most was the slot where she had to put homework and test papers. She always had to write them out in a punch code they made her learn when she was six years old, and the mechanical teacher calculated the mark in no time.

The Inspector had smiled after he was finished and patted her head. He said to her mother, "It's not the little girl's fault, Mrs. Jones. I think the geography sector was geared a little too quick. Those things happen sometimes. I've slowed it up to an average ten-year level. Actually, the overall pattern of her progress is quite satisfactory." And he patted Margie's head again.

Margie was disappointed. She had been hoping they would take the teacher away altogether. They had once taken Tommy's teacher away for nearly a month because the history sector had blanked out completely.

So she said to Tommy, "Why would anyone write about school?"

Tommy looked at her with very superior eyes. "Because it's not our kind of school, stupid. This is the old kind of school that they had hundreds and hundreds of years ago." He added loftily, pronouncing the word carefully, "*Centuries* ago."

Margie was hurt. "Well, I don't know what kind of school they had all that time ago." She read the book over his shoulder for a while, then said, "Anyway, they had a teacher."

"Sure they had a teacher, but it wasn't a *regular* teacher. It was a man."

"A man? How could a man be a teacher?"

"Well, he just told the boys and girls things and gave them homework and asked them questions."

"A man isn't smart enough."

"Sure he is. My father knows as much as my teacher."

"He can't. A man can't know as much as a teacher."

"He knows almost as much I betcha."

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Margie wasn't prepared to dispute that. She said, "I wouldn't want a strange man in my house to teach me."

Tommy screamed with laughter, "You don't know much, Margie. The teachers didn't live in the house. They had a special building and all the kids went there."

"And all the kids learned the same thing?"

"Sure, if they were the same age."

"But my mother says a teacher has to be adjusted to fit the mind of each boy and girl it teaches and that each kid has to be taught differently."

"Just the same they didn't do it that way then. If you don't like it, you don't have to read the book."

"I didn't say I didn't like it," Margie said quickly. She wanted to read about those funny schools.

They weren't even half finished when Margie's mother called, "Margie! School!"

Margie looked up. "Not yet, mamma."

"Now," said Mrs. Jones. "And it's probably time for Tommy, too."

Margie said to Tommy, "Can I read the book some more with you after school?"

"Maybe," he said, nonchalantly. He walked away whistling, the dusty old book tucked beneath his arm.

Margie went into the schoolroom. It was right next to her bedroom, and the mechanical teacher was on and waiting for her. It was always on at the same time every day except Saturday and Sunday, because her mother said little girls learned better if they learned at regular hours.

The screen was lit up, and it said: "Today's arithmetic lesson is on the addition of proper fractions. Please insert yesterday's homework in the proper slot."

Margie did so with a sigh. She was thinking about the old schools they had when her grandfather's grandfather was a little boy. All the kids from the whole neighborhood came, laughing and shouting in the schoolyard, sitting together in the schoolroom, going home together at the end of the day. They learned the same things so they could help one another on the homework and talk about it.

And the teachers were people. . . .

The mechanical teacher was flashing on the screen: "When we add the fractions ½ and ¼ —"

Margie was thinking about how the kids must have loved it in the old days. She was thinking about the fun they had.

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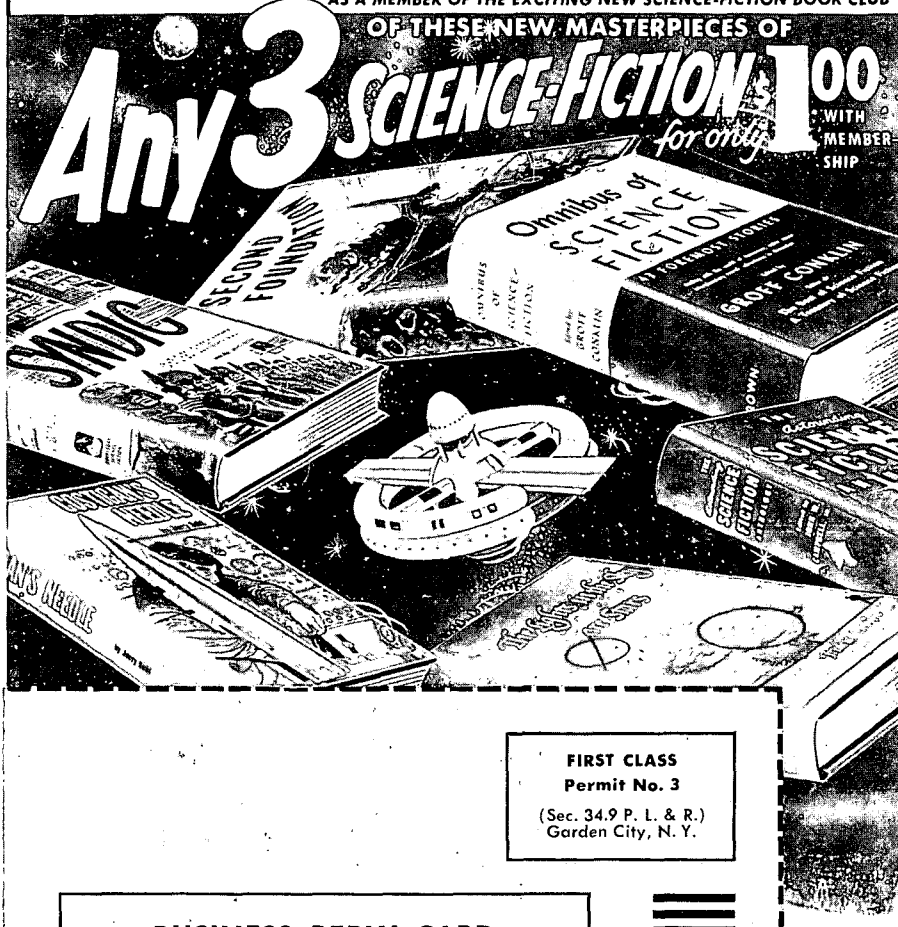

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